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July 15th

The Explorer

By

Arthur O. Friel

DUNCAN McMILLAN

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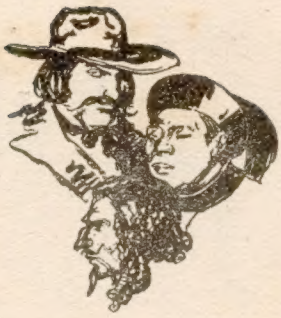

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The EXPLORER

To ride the white rapids, to plunge into the throbbing depths of the Orinoco jungle into the forbidden land of the poisoned arrow Indians—all this Hammond would dare, in the full confidence of youth. Experience he had absolutely none Of course, there was his new companion Thomas, but then, he was only a trader

CHAPTER I

A SHIP COMES IN

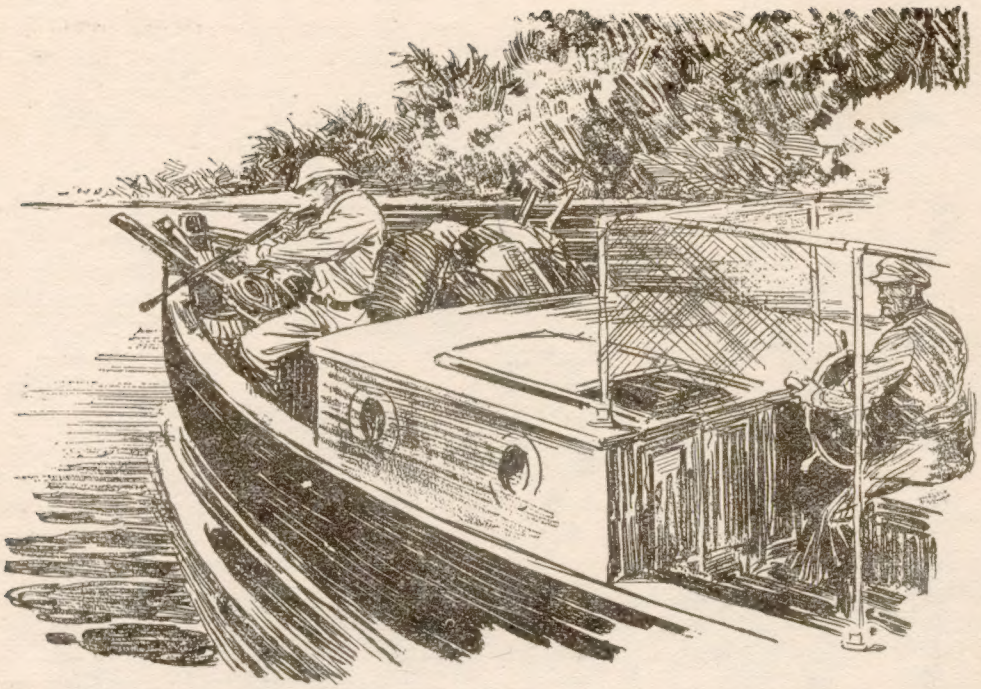
THE STEAMER *Delta*, Port-of-Spain to Ciudad Bolívar, hurled herself against the down-sweeping Orinoco.

Far forward, her tall single stack belched a smudge of gray smoke, to be tossed aside or ahead and then blown to nothing by the vigorous following wind. Aft, fluttering to port or starboard as the channel veered, a flag of red and blue and gold struggled in the power of the same ceaseless air current; a flag on whose broad azure midstripe fitfully shone seven white stars; the flag of the United States of Venezuela. Astern, the huge paddle-wheel thrashed the sullen yellow water into snarling white. From dripping prow to foam flecked paddle hood, the ship vibrated with the rapid thrust of her engines. She was nearing her western terminus and ending her thirty-six hour run with a Spanish flourish.

On the shaded fore deck lounged several passengers, white or near white. Three or four short, swarthy men with prosperous paunches and shrewd eyes, who placidly discussed prices of merchandise and indifferently gazed across the wide reaches on either hand, were indubitably merchants. An erect, elderly Spaniard accompanied by a handsome young woman might be an official from Caracas, a well to do townsman, or a rancher. A lanky stripling who ostentatiously puffed a cheap cigar and covertly eyed the girl was probably a clerk acting as messenger. All these, and a couple of shifty eyed, poorly dressed men who leaned on the rail and sometimes muttered to each other, were unmistakably of Latin ancestry.

Remained two others, of whom one was palpably foreign, while the second might be either native or outlander.

The foreigner, tall, young, lightly sunburned, wore gray tropic worsted of American cut, white English sun helmet,



A Complete Novel by ARTHUR O. FRIEL

striped shirt with soft collar, maroon bow tie, and tan shoes soled with crêpe rubber. On his cross legged lap a book lay open, a long finger holding the place; but the gray eyes under the slightly tilted brim of the helmet looked more often at the curving river vistas ahead than at the page of print. To the observant other man it was evident that he was an American, and newly come to the tropics.

His clothing—except the English headgear—was not only American, but Eastern; not only Eastern, but urban; not only urban but, in certain unobtrusive details, collegiate. The helmet had undoubtedly been purchased in the British island of Trinidad, where all Northerners must tranship from ocean liner to this river boat if they would enter Venezuela. And the colored satin tie betrayed his inexperience in the torrid zone. Men of longer residence in the hot lands knew well that cravats of such deep dyes soon stain collars.

The quiet observer, half a head shorter than the newcomer, was garbed all in loose white, except above the watchful eyes. There rested a cool, comfortable English silk cap, more suitable for use aboard ship than the heavy helmet of the younger man. The face beneath the low drawn visor might be English, American, or possibly Spanish. There are blond Spaniards, even in Venezuela; and this man was blond. His skin, tanned by many suns and pitted here and there by old bites of tropic insects, lacked the dark tinge of the bronzed brunette. His hair and brows and short military mustache were of varying shades; the hair very light, the brows darker, the lip growth darkest and heaviest of all, yet none black. The narrowed eyes were blue. The thin cheeks, long nose, full lips, and small but determined jaw gave scant clue to his nationality.

Nor was his speech more relevant. He talked little, though he replied readily if addressed. To the Venezuelans he responded in their own apocopated

language—which differs from the Spanish of Castile—yet with a touch of foreign accent. To the tall young foreigner he had once volunteered a remark the enunciation of which seemed a hybrid between the flat American drawl and the broad, yet quick, English mode of speech. The answer had been curt, accompanied by a cool stare. Since then the two had outwardly ignored each other.

NOW THEY sat silent and aloof. The *Delta* quivered onward. The overriden Orinoco hissed under the bow, seethed under the stern, but let her pass on through the morning blaze of sun. Presently a mestizo steward, with unbuttoned white coat revealing a soiled shirt minus collar, dawdled forward to drop a few toneless words into the ears of the passengers. All but one of them looked expectantly ahead, then moved languidly toward the saloon, whence opened the doors of their cramped cabins. The exception was the newcome Northerner.

At sound of the steward's voice he glanced up uncomprehendingly. As the mestizo sauntered onward, the foreigner watched him an instant longer, looked ahead, dropped his gaze to his book. Nothing new was in sight. Only the monotonous saffron water, the dull green verdure topping its banks, the brilliant blue sky flecked by drifting white cumuli, met his swift inspection. The steward might be prematurely hinting at tips. So the traveler gave renewed attention to the text on his gray clad knee.

As the others stepped toward the deeper shade of the interior, four of them glanced at the good looking young fellow sitting thus unresponsive. The Spanish girl eyed him wistfully, then, obedient to the compulsion of the ondrawing arm of her guardian—or, perhaps, husband—walked inside without another look. The quiet blond man stood a second, regarding the broad white helmet, took one step forward, paused, turned without speaking and faded from sight. The sly eyed pair at the rail, moving sluggishly after the rest, slid sidewise scrutinies at him as they passed. One nudged the other. Three short paces beyond him they paused, exchanging glances, then shooting a swift survey all about.

Save for themselves and the absorbed reader, the deck now was deserted. Inside, the other passengers were dispersing into their rooms. The steward had wandered back aft. Although it was broad day and Ciudad Bolívar lay just beyond the next curve, the opportunity was good. These men were opportunists. The well dressed señor must be rich; they were poor; nobody watched. A quick thrust, a rapid rifling of pockets, a heave over the near rail, and they would no longer be in financial straits.

Hands under threadbare coats, the sinister pair stepped noiselessly nearer to the rich señor.

"Ciudad Bolívar, next stop!"

The incisive voice broke from the saloon entrance. The creeping couple jerked to about face. The new helmet lifted sharply, poised a second, turned as gray eyes darted backward. In the wide opening stood the blond man, expressionless, gazing impersonally at all three loiterers. His coat now hung open, and his brown hands rested lightly on a broad belt.

The hairy hands at the other belts came forth, empty. The seedy travelers sidled to their left, narrowly watching the unwelcome interrupter, whose cool blue eyes still dwelt on them. Along the footway between rail and cabins they passed, vanishing rearward. The foreigner, after a short look at the officious announcer, negligently closed his book, stood up and peered into the western dayshine.

AROUND a sweeping curve the steamer rushed to enter a long straightaway stretch. Far ahead, off the port bow, appeared a toy city; a city of yellow walled, red roofed doll houses rising in tiers from the river and encircling a dome shaped hillock. Beyond, the river vanished between bluff banks.

For several minutes the visitor watched

the metropolis of the Orinoco slide toward him, increasing in size and clarity of detail at each revolution of the rumbling paddlewheel. Then he turned and walked toward his stateroom. If he had thought it obligatory to speak in passing to the man who had so abruptly translated the words of the steward, he was spared the necessity. The white figure was gone from the entrance.

The steamer rushed west, holding to midstream, though the city now lay broad off to port. Ahead rose a mass of rocks, topped by a slender radio tower. Straight toward it the ship raced as if bent on crashing suicide. But then she veered to port, swung grandly in a sweeping arc, and slowed. The paddles thundered in reverse. Bow downstream, starboard beam snug against the wharfless hillside, the heavy vessel took anchorage with deft ease. Her final flourish was complete.

A crowd of mestizo baggage handlers swarmed about the shore end of the gangplank, but none of them ascended it. A small, alert man with sharp black eyes marched briskly up the bending bridge, paused a moment to inspect papers presented by the purser, nodded, threaded his way among heaped baggage, mounted a narrow companionway to the passenger deck. Another man, taller and stouter, in inconspicuous clothing, remained at the foot of the plank, right thumb carelessly hooked over his waistband at the hip bone. The waiting porters, silent, eyed him and exchanged winks and nudges, then looked expectantly into the shadows at the upper end. Ensued a long period of quietude.

IN THE saloon, the little doctor gave the gathered travelers a quick survey, nodded to two or three, and ran rapid glances over their credentials. Last in the short line came the tall stranger in gray and the shorter man in white. The former carried in one hand a huge kitbag stuffed to capacity; in the other an open passport, with officially stamped vaccination certificate clipped to one edge. The latter, a step behind, had only a short, battered suitcase and a small slip of paper. His silk cap had been replaced by an inexpensive brown topi, constructed for service rather than for style.

The doctor, with a friendly glance into the serious young face above his own, plucked the passport from the long fingers and perused it deliberately. Then he nodded and smiled as he returned the papers.

"Welcome to Venezuela," he said, in his native tongue. "Permit me to wish you good fortune in your studies, Señor—ah—Jamón."

The other made no reply. Behind him sounded a quick, repressed laugh.

The man in white was grinning. Both the Señor Jamón and the doctor looked at him with slight annoyance. The cause of his sudden mirth remained unexplained, however, and after a chilly survey the gray eyed youth moved away. The doctor gave the departing stranger a brief look tinged with displeasure.

"*Nuevo*," remarked the brown helmeted man, now poker faced.

"*Sí*, it is plain that he is new," assented the other. "New and stiff. If his passport did not say he came from your America I should think him one of those rude English."

"You don't like the English, do you?" chuckled the blond. "They're not bad fellows. Did you say this *hombre* had come here to study?"

"So his passport says. Travel and study. He has a few things to learn."

"We all have. The man who has no more to learn is dead. *No es verdad?*"

"True." The medical officer grinned. "And how are you now, Señor Tomás?"

"Perfectly fit. Here is my bill of health from Trinidad."

"It is unnecessary." The examiner waved aside the proffered slip of paper, studying instead the man who tendered it. "Yes, you do look much better."

"I am. I needed rest and change of air more than anything else. Now I am good for another year up the river."

"With the protection of God," solemnly

added the townsman. "Without it no white man can exist in that country of death. Well, there are no more passengers, so—"

"Except a couple of rats," interrupted the Señor Tomás.

"Rats?"

"*Sí.* They boarded the ship at San Felix."

"Oh! Those two? Yes, we had word of them—and a catcher of rats waits at the end of the plank. Rats have few brains. Else they might remember that there is a telegraph line to this port."

The two chuckled. Then they jumped. From shore sounded rapid revolver shots.

They dashed out to the rail and looked down. At the end of the gangplank lay two men, one dead, one writhing. Above them stood the plain clothed man who had watched for their appearance. In his right fist was clutched a police revolver, short, black, deadly. Set faced, tense muscled, he poised ready to shoot again. But the knives had fallen from the hands of the dead and the dying. In a few seconds the contorted form which had retained life became motionless.

The shot pair were the shifty eyed, soft footed men who recently had leaned on the rail and more recently had crept toward the back of an unsuspicious visitor.

The detective relaxed, slid his gun back into its hidden holster, spoke harshly. Obsequious mestizos picked up the fallen daggers and handed them to him. Holding the hilts casually in one capacious palm, he walked away, climbing the steep hillside toward the high, wide Calle Orinoco, main street of the city.

Passengers who had debarked before the criminals essayed to slink down the bridge behind them stared at him as he passed. Halfway down the plank a tall, gray clad American, latest to leave the steamer, stood, frozen, mouth open, eyes wide as he watched that grim figure march up the slope. Hesitant, he remained motionless, until the killer was gone from view.

Then, with a buzzing surge, the mestizos closed on the corpses like carrion flies, eagerly searching for the death wounds, exchanging fragmentary exclamations appreciative of the swift drama. The passengers beyond them departed the scene with sudden haste, the girl, white lipped, leaning heavily on the arm of her elderly protector. The young Northerner wavered, looking now at the crowding breeds, then slowly walked backward, upward, shipward, withdrawing from the nearness of death and of those who gloated on it.

The little doctor at the rail smiled thinly. The Señor Tomás voiced a short, hard grunt. Turning, he walked fast to the companionway, ran down it, shouldered aside the silent watcher in gray, and swung truculently down the bridge to shore.

"*Fuera!*" he snapped. "Make way!"

The mestizos parted. Across the bodies he strode with hardly a glance, and up the hill he plodded with no backward look.

On the momentarily pale cheeks of the jostled newcomer spread a hot flush. His eyes glimmered, his jaw hardened, his fist shut more tightly on the handle of his bag. With no further hesitation he marched down the gangway, across the corpses, and up the parched incline to the street.

CHAPTER II

STRANGERS MEET

ON THE sidewalk surmounting the long slope a small dark patrolman in dull blue uniform moved to intercept the climbing white men. To the first arrival he spoke mildly, with a glance at the worn suitcase.

"The bag must go to the *aduana*, señor."

"I know it, *hombre*," drawled the traveler, "and since this is all the baggage I have, I carry it straight to the custom house myself."

The diminutive officer gave him a steady look, accepted his promise, turned his gaze to the flush faced follower. As the latter set foot on the cement the

watchman repeated the warning—to find it ignored. The gray eyes swept over him, dismissed him, turned to freeze on the blue ones.

"I say," coldly asserted the Señor Jamón, "you'd better not shove a white man again like that!"

"Like what?" innocently inquired the Señor Tomás.

"You know!"

"Ah," vaguely remarked the other. "Well, yes, now that I think of it, maybe I do. But if you don't like to be shoved, old chap, you'd better keep going ahead when you're under way. A man who starts, stops and backs without signaling is liable to get bumped."

The flush deepened, the curved mouth tightened; but no angry retort was forthcoming. Instead, Jamón looked uncomfortably back at the ghoulish crowd at the waterside. A brief silence, then the patrolman, tapping the bag, raised inquiring brows.

"Oh, get out!" the Northerner flung at him. "I carry my own baggage."

With that he turned sharply away and took several steps with the evident intention of ridding himself of a pest. The little officer stared, scowled, muttered something, and started purposefully after him.

"Take it easy there," dryly advised Tomás. "This fellow is no porter. He's a cop. And he's telling you to send that bag to the custom house like everybody else. You'll have to do it, Jamón, or Hambone, or whatever your name is—"

"Hammond!" The badgered stranger turned back with a glare.

"Oh, Hammond. That's what I thought it was, until you let the doctor call you a *jamón*—meaning a ham—and made no kick. The doctor gets funny pronunciations, though. My own name, by the way, is Thomas. Well, now, Hammond, you'll have to put all your stuff through the customs. You have more than this, I suppose? Several trunks, maybe? I thought so. Then you'll have to give the job of moving it to a boss *portador* back yonder—" he turned a thumb shipward— "and let his *mozos* freight everything up for inspection. That means your bag, too. You can't walk off with that."

The gray eyes dropped significantly to the suitcase in the leather hued hand.

"Unless you're known to be a square shooter," amended Thomas. "And you're not known yet, Señor Jam—I mean Hammond. To continue the sad story, you'll pay the *portador*, and the customs tolls—one bolívar per package—and whatever duties they feel like demanding. You may find those duties rather stiff. Unless, of course, you feel like fixing up the matter quietly with the right man in the *aduana*. That saves time."

He paused, awaiting reply. None came.

"And if you've brought in any guns you'll give them up. Firearms are contraband."

AT THAT a sudden scowl cleft the forehead under the white helmet. The gray eyes sharply probed the blue ones, then roved along the broad, one sided street as if seeking something. From end to far end stretched low yellow walls, pierced by open doors and windows which admitted the strong northeast breeze, and cut at intervals by corners of transverse streets leading on up the hill. Partly intercepting the view, short, thick trees ranged along the mid-space of the parklike opening—trees which still bore on their bark the pits of bullets fired in the long past Gomez revolution. Through scattered openings were visible flags tugging at their staffs; flags all the same—the seven starred colors of Venezuela. No others were in sight.

"And then you will have your remaining belongings portered to the Hotel Bolívar, of course," concluded Thomas. "It's the best here—and not too good, at that. I'm going there myself. If I can assist you in any way before I go, say the word."

Hammond hesitated. One finger ran along his smooth jaw, where sweat stood pendent. Abruptly he demanded—

"Where's the American consul?"

A tolerant chuckle answered. To the attentive patrolman Thomas remarked—

"The señor asks where he can find the American consul."

The brown face went blank. The brown eyes slid from end to end of the breezy *prado* and back again. A brown hand scratched a brown ear. At length sudden light flickered over the brown face. A finger pointed to the left.

Thomas chuckled again.

"He's pointing to the British consulate," he confided, "and that's your answer. If you really want anything done, go there."

"I'm an American!" growled Hammond.

"So am I," was the unexpected retort.

The newcomer stared. The other calmly continued:

"There is an American consular agency, which is not by several degrees the same thing as a consulate, within pistol shot, .22 caliber. But when a Bolívar cop doesn't even know where it is, you can draw your own conclusions as to its importance here."

With that he glanced to the right, as if remembering some urgent personal need. Nearly all the other passengers now had faded from sight.

"Where is the American agency?" persisted Hammond.

His compatriot looked back at him, then at those near by—a knot of loafers, including several boys. He felt in a pocket, voiced sudden imperative words. Two boys came running. To these he gave rapid instructions in vernacular, meanwhile displaying two silver reales, on which the young eyes fastened eagerly.

"*Sí, señor!*" they chorused.

One trotted away to the right. The other waited.

"This lad," then announced the man in white, "will lead you to your agency. You will leave your bag here—"

"And let this uniformed monkey take what he likes? Hardly!"

"You have no choice!" Thomas' voice became impatient. "And he will steal nothing. He's an officer. He knows better. Now I'm on my way. See you later, maybe."

Hammond regarded him uncertainly, eyed the smaller man in dingy blue, and then, in tacit surrender, set down his bag. To the waiting boy he said—

"*Vamos!*"

The half-clad urchin started promptly across the plaza, followed closely by his convoy.

THOMAS looked after them, betraying surprise at sound of that parting word, which, though somewhat mispronounced, was indisputably Spanish. Then he tossed a request to the Venezuelan:

"Tell Felipe to bring up the baggage of the señor. And give this bag into the hands of none but Felipe himself. You and he are responsible for it. *Comprende?*"

"*Sí.* And the pay for the porterage—"

"At the Hotel Bolívar."

"*Bueno.*"

The brown eyes squinted waterward, seeking Felipe, the head porter chosen. The mass of mestizos now had disintegrated into industrious parts, some of which were already climbing the stiff slope with astonishing burdens perched on their heads. The slain criminals had been moved to one side of the path, and lay disregarded. With no further attention to anything below or beside him, Thomas walked away to the right, moving with a loose, easy stride which covered ground with minimum effort.

Diagonally across the plaza and up a narrow side street he proceeded, to enter an open doorway unmarked by any sign. At a small desk in the wide room beyond, a lax muscled Venezuelan eyed him, nodded, and glanced at the suitcase.

"Nothing dutiable?" he yawned.

"*Nada.* But look."

The official indifferently scrutinized the opened case, which revealed only clothing, shaving kit and a couple of books.

"Passed," he murmured.

"Thanks." Thomas closed the bag.

"By the way, there will be a Señor Hammond, who is new here. If he should need —well, an interpreter, perhaps—I shall be at the Bolívar."

"*Bien.*"

The official smiled slightly. Thomas ambled out into the sun.

Westward along two or three blocks of cobbled street and yellow walls he passed, then, turning left, ascended the sidewalk of the steep Calle Libertad. At a doorway which, like that of the custom house, bore no sign to distinguish it from those of private residences, he entered. A boy, leaning against the wall of a short corridor, straightened up. He was the one who had recently departed the plaza at the white man's behest.

"The señora has saved the room for you, señor," he respectfully announced. With a flash of teeth, he added, "I beat the merchants here by half a block. So they got dark rooms."

"*Bueno!* Here is your real, and something more."

The small brown hand joyously snatched the Spanish dime and the two ponderous English pennies.

"A thousand thanks, señor! May you live a thousand years—and travel often on the steamer!"

"Get out, you rascal!" grinned Thomas.

Giggling, the rascal went. The traveler proceeded along a balcony, overlooking a flowered patio on which dining tables were ranged, pushed open a slatted door, glanced about and took possession of a narrow room furnished with white iron bed, small unvarnished table, rickety chair and peeling washstand. On either side rose an incomplete partition, some eight feet high, cheaply papered, which failed by several feet to reach the ceiling. At the end a tall window, heavily grilled, stood open to errant breezes, its doorlike wooden shutters swung back against the walls. Outside lay the street, down which now came filing several sedate burros laden with country produce.

With a perfunctory glance at the passing animals, Thomas cast his helmet on the table, dropped his bag, shed his coat, laid it on the chair, and sat on the bed, all in one uninterrupted motion.

"Back again," he soliloquized, passing a hand over his thin, damp hair, then running a shirtsleeve down over his slightly perspiring face. "Seems like home, too. Funny, the way this country calls a chap back after he's grown used to it."

For a moment he sat resting and growing cool in the gently moving air. Then he opened his suitcase and drew out a pair of *alpargatas*—Venezuelan sandals, flat soled, open toed, with straps of faded carpetcloth. Absently he unlaced his English shoes, tossed them under the bed, slid on the Spanish footgear. From a belt holster he drew a heavy revolver, which he dropped into the service worn handbag.

"But," he added, eyes on the weapon, "she's a rather temperamental country to get used to. Full of the unexpected. You've got to get acquainted with her before you know what she's likely to do—and then she'll probably do something else."

He laughed quietly and lounged a moment longer, gazing downward. Then he reached to the one pillow on the bed, twitched it into a new position, and lay back, legs over the edge, as if awaiting a call at any moment. His eyes closed.

Time slid away. Feet softly passed the window. Quiet voices spoke and died. A middle aged woman, short, plump, wooden faced—the hotelkeeper—noiselessly opened the door, assured herself that the expected guest had arrived, and withdrew. At length a far telephone bell tinkled. Soon thereafter a hand knocked at the door.

"*Qué?*" demanded Thomas, sitting up.

"Señor Tomás is wanted at the *aduana*," said a soft Spanish voice.

"*Pronto.*"

Feet shuffled away. Thomas yawned, arose, shut and locked his suitcase, donned coat and hat, walked doorward. As he went he muttered—

"I thought so, Señor Jamón."

CHAPTER III

THE EXPLORER

THE *ADUANA* of Ciudad Bolívar had passed all passengers but one. That one, gray suited, white helmeted, red faced, stood amid several open trunks, holding in one hand a tiny Spanish phrase book. Near by were several snickering mestizos, three grave featured but smiling lipped local merchants and two grim jawed customs officials. One of the latter held an American takedown repeating rifle, stock in one hand, barrel in the other. His fellow clutched a flat .45 pistol.

"*Perro—perro—*" heatedly protested the newcomer, "*je suis* an American—*Americano*—and I go—*je m'en vais*—oh, what is the damn' word?" A frenzied ruffle of small pages ensued, accompanied by repetitions of, "*Perro—perro—*"

"Take it easy," drawled a new voice in English. "If you're trying to say 'but', the word is *pero*, not *perro*. *Perro* means dog, and it won't get you anything to keep calling these chaps dogs, you know. What's the difficulty, if any?"

Thomas, placidly puffing at a Venezuelan cigarrillo, stood within arm's length of the harassed Hammond. On hearing his voice, the pair of customs officials relaxed somewhat from rigid tension. Hammond himself, after a swift look, also betrayed unmistakable relief.

"Oh, hullo," he greeted, awkwardly. "Why—er—the trouble is that these ignorant spiggoties don't seem to understand their own language. I'm trying to tell them—"

"Let me tell them," interrupted the other.

He cast a slow look over the gaping trunks, whence hung lengths of gaudy cloth; at the litter of clothing, boots, cartridge boxes and miscellaneous articles on the cement floor; at the glistening new guns in the hands of the officials.

"But say, what are you?" he puzzled. "A cloth salesman, or a gun smuggler, or what?"

"I am an explorer!" was the haughty assertion.

Thomas dropped his cigaret. One hand lifted to an ear.

"Come again," he requested.

"You heard me the first time. An explorer."

"Of what?"

"The Orinoco."

"Good Lord!" murmured Thomas. "Another one! My dear fellow, the Orinoco was explored in 1760, officially, and has been traveled oodles of times since, unofficially. But far be it from me to discourage you. The United States probably doesn't know it yet. And the Orinoco can stand one more exploration, if you can. If you're an explorer, just show these chaps your credentials, and the agony will cease."

"Er—I haven't any," admitted Hammond.

"What? No papers? None at all?"

"Why—er—only my passport and a note to the consul."

"Oh. Yes. The American consul. And where's your consul?"

"At home in the English island of Trinidad!" A sudden note of wrath came into the stranger's voice.

"As usual." Thomas smiled. "And you found only a clerk or two who didn't *comprende* and politely gave you the gate. I knew it. Well, now, let's see. With no papers and no consular aid, you'll just have to exert other influence. Ah—come over here a minute."

He moved a few feet aside, toward a shady spot where nobody stood. Hammond frowned, hesitated, grudgingly followed.

"Have you a gold piece on you?" queried Thomas.

"Maybe. Why?"

"If you want to finish up here with no more argument, let's have it, and I'll plant it where it will get results. If you'd prefer to stay and make the American eagle scream—and the French cock crow—that's your privilege. You'll find that both birds together will sound like unhatched eggs to these chaps. But the honk of the golden goose works wonders. Well?"

Hammond, narrow lidded, contemplated his disordered belongings and considered. His lips opened and closed. Slowly one hand sank into a trousers pocket. Emerging, it brought out a roll of bills, some silver and copper change and several gold coins.

"Your guns will have to stay here until permission to take them out is granted by Caracas," supplemented Thomas. "The law is very strict just now. But if you're on the level that can be fixed up soon. And everything else can be cleared in five minutes."

The long fingers clenched, and the gray eyes went to the seized weapons. But then the grip on the money loosened again. Thomas selected one of the smaller gold pieces.

"Wait here," he bade, "and watch your stuff."

SAUNTERING into a hallway where a broad staircase ascended to upper offices, he faded from view. Minutes snailed away. Then the stairs squeaked and the white figure reappeared. In the hand which had carried the coin now was a slip of paper. Casually he passed the note to the official holding the pistol.

The latter scanned it, muttered to his companion, spoke bruskly to one of the mestizos. The brown fellow promptly began repacking the trunks.

"Simple, when you know how," remarked Thomas. "Now just see that everything is put back, and lock it up and get your receipt for your guns and cartridges—be sure you don't neglect that part of it—and we can toddle along. You're going to the Bolívar?"

"I guess so. Er—I'm obliged to you, Mr. Thompson."

"Thomas. No obligation. Glad I happened to be passing by."

Thomas lighted another cigaret, covertly studying the other's face. Finding there no surprise at the last remark, he smiled as he cast away the match. The telephone call for aid had not come from the American.

In a few more minutes the pair were walking side by side hotelward, while out on the cobbled midway stocky laborers sweated under the ponderous head borne trunks. As they turned into Calle Libertad the rescued alien spoke with the abruptness which seemed characteristic.

"I say—er—I guess I was a bit nasty to you earlier, you know. Let me apologize."

"Forget it. I can overlook a good deal in an explorer."

"That so? Why?"

Thomas made no answer—unless a wink at a little lizard on a near wall, unobserved by his companion, constituted a reply. The two walked on in silence.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRADER

AT A SMALL table at the far end of the dining balcony Hammond sat alone, chewing stubbornly at well cooked but tough beef. At the neighboring tables Venezuelan business men and politicians devoured their midday *comida* amid much talk, mirth and clatter of fork and knife, with occasional glances of curiosity at the fresh faced young stranger who never returned their interest. Whenever his eyes lifted from the edibles before him they rested on the flowers in the patio. Cool, controlled, aloof, he ate as if nobody else were present.

Behind him stood open the door of the small dark room which had been the best he could obtain in this diminutive hostelry. The one story hotel was merely a former residence, slightly remodeled, in which the only rooms with outer windows were those facing the street. Those ranging along the side walls received their scant illumination from tiny skylights, their air from the doorways; so they were both dim and stuffy. To these inferior quarters newcomers were habitually assigned. The better ones always went to men who were known, both personally and financially, and who knew how to get them.

Now, as Hammond desisted from his

meal and drew from a silver case an expensive Northern cigaret, one of those experienced men suddenly appeared at his table, jerked back a chair facing him and sank into it.

"Howdy," greeted Thomas. "I'm a little late. Been down at the waterfront, looking things over. Hullo, they've got a new waitress since I went out. Much better looking, too. *Moza! Aquí, prontamente!*"

"*Sí, senor.*"

A tall, dark but handsome girl smiled at him and walked lithely away, waiting for no questions as to the bill of fare, which, previously fixed by the mistress of the house, admitted of no choice. Almost immediately she was back with a tray containing two courses, which the belated diner attacked with speed and avidity. Before the second was finished the rest of his meal was awaiting him.

Hammond, smoking with impersonal air and apparently gazing into the patio, nevertheless missed nothing. When the older man sat back and lit another cigarrillo he inquired—

"How do you do it?"

"Eh?" puzzled Thomas.

"Get served so quickly. I got mine after all these spiggoties got theirs."

"I'm known. You're not—yet."

"But you said this waitress was new to you."

"She is," grinned Thomas, "but the señora who runs the place knows me. And what she says goes."

"Oh." Hammond drew again at his white roll. "I see."

Thomas eyed him, knocked an ash to the tiled floor, frowned a little.

"Go easy," he warned. "Don't see too much. I've taken afternoon tea with the señora a few times—English fashion—and contributed a little applesauce to the meal. She's originally English—colonial—and somewhat *passé* besides, so she appreciates it. That's all."

Hammond made no answer. He drew another puff, killed the short butt on the edge of his plate, looked again into the patio. The brown girl unobtrusively removed the empty dishes of Thomas, smiled again at him and withdrew. To the younger and handsomer stranger she gave neither smile nor look. Nor did the stranger glance at her.

THOMAS smoked deliberately. Just outside the edge of the gallery roof the sun beat down with fierce intensity. Inside, the moving air was comparatively cool, though the breeze was slowly dying into breathless afternoon calm. Neighboring tables had grown vacant, their full fed patrons having gone, unnoticed, to enjoy the customary post-prandial siesta. Neither of the Americans, however, showed signs of incipient dormancy. Outwardly idle, each waited for the other to speak again. Inwardly they sized up each other anew.

Thomas saw a clear skinned, wavy haired, steady eyed man some ten years his junior, wide shouldered, deep chested, potentially powerful of physique—yet apparently unused to pitting his forces against adversaries or adversities. Features inherently strong revealed little indication of molding by conflicts with life, or even by sustained purposes. Their expression was that of cool superiority, based not on personal conceit but on habituation to deference by others, and backed, probably, by wealth and assured social standing.

"A rich man's son," judged Thomas, "who has never had to use his head much. But it looks like a good head."

Hammond, surreptitiously observing his *vis-à-vis*, noted the tall brow and long, narrow head hitherto covered by cap or helmet; the many fine wrinkles etched about the eyes; the long nose, the full mouth, and the small chin. The wrinkles and the narrow lidded gaze were perhaps the result of sun glare, but they gave an effect of shrewd perception and calculation. The wide lips bespoke customary good humor, yet looked as if they might readily take on a hard, uncompromising set. The slightly receding chin hinted at a lack of aggressiveness; but this was more than counterbalanced by tenacious nose

and resolute jaw. Noticeable lines from the nostrils to the lower cheeks, coupled with permanently tanned skin and insect scars betokened experience at facing both the world in general and the torrid out of doors.

"Some sort of trader, trying to get together a little fortune down here," was Hammond's guess. "I wonder if he's planning to make something out of me."

Then he again contemplated the patio.

THOMAS dropped his charred butt, yawned shortly and remarked:

"I'm rather interested in the doings of explorers. Used to think I'd like to be one myself. If you don't mind telling me, where are you going to explore?"

"I told you. Up the Orinoco."

"Oh, yes; but that's a considerable stretch. Fourteen hundred miles, the old explorers call it. What particular section did you have in mind?"

"All of it."

"Hmmm!" Thomas softly hummed through his nose. "That's a large order. You intend to go clear to the source?"

The other nodded, as calmly as if asked whether he meant to stroll about the town.

Thomas dropped his gaze to the tablecloth, on which he began indenting aimless lines with a thumbnail.

"That's a healthy ambition—or a very unhealthy one," he declared after a moment. "If you can do that you'll have all other explorers of these parts licked. The source, you know, has never been reached. If I'm not too inquisitive, how do you plan to fix up the Guaharibos?"

"The what?"

The old man's lips twitched.

"The Gua-ha-ri-bos," he carefully pronounced. "The untamable, poison arrowed savages who hold the country around the source and who attack all white men at sight. The fellows who have killed or driven out every explorer who tried to pass the raudal—that's a rapid, you know—that marks the entrance to their Godforsaken land. They're the reason why nobody knows just where this big river begins. You've heard of them, of course; an explorer always gets all the information he can before he starts. How are you going to get past those uncompromising jungle gentlemen?"

A silence. Then—

"Oh, I'll give them a few trinkets, some bright cloth and so on."

"Oh, I see. Some of that gaudy cloth you brought in your trunks? Ah, yes. But suppose they won't take it?"

"Indians always want cloth," was the tolerant reply.

"Oh, do they? Always? When they're so savage that they make no fires, eat their meat raw, wear nothing at all and wouldn't know what to do with cloth if they had it, they still want cloth, do they? No, they don't! The books you've been reading, and the armchair explorers you may have consulted, didn't know the Guaharibos."

A sudden flush dyed the younger face, and the gray eyes glinted angrily. Without awaiting reply, Thomas drove on:

"Moreover, that very thing has been tried—and it failed. An American explorer, Dr. Price, who has tried for years to locate the source of this tough old river—you know of him, of course—"

He paused a second. Hammond showed no recognition of the name.

"He reached the Raudal Guaharibo some years ago," continued Thomas, "and when the Guaharibos came out to meet him he held up cloth, mirrors, all the usual trade stuff. And they closed in on him, yelling blood and murder and shooting poisoned arrows at him. And he and his party got out *muy pronto*, with all their guns working; and they were lucky to get clear, at that. So I'd hardly say that the chance of buying off the Guaharibos with cloth was very good."

ANOTHER silence, quite prolonged. The explorer looked somewhat disconcerted. Presently, however, he nonchalantly remarked—

"Well, I can leave out that part of the river, I dare say."

"I would, if I were you."

Thomas grinned and executed another design with his nail.

"I think perhaps I shall. And, by the way, Mr. Thomp—ah—Thomas, you evidently know the Indians hereabouts. Do you do your trading with them?"

"Eh?"

Thomas looked surprised. Hammond smiled.

"I say, do you trade with the Indians? Or is your business with the small town shops?"

The weatherworn countenance wrinkled oddly. Hammond's smile broadened. Thomas suddenly masked his gaze, studiously regarding the random lines he had impressed on the cloth. His reply came with unusual hesitation.

"Why—er—I trade sometimes with one, sometimes with the other. I—er—have done more business with Indians, though, I should say. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I just wondered." The recent arrival continued to smile contentedly. "Of course you understand that I don't wish to intrude on any private grounds of yours, or to spoil any of your bargains by giving the Indians my own trade goods. There's room enough for both of us, I'm sure."

The jaw muscles stood out on the lean bronzed cheeks. In a repressed tone Thomas acknowledged:

"That's certainly decent of you, old chap. But I think I have things pretty well sewed up in my own territory. And you're not going there anyway, if you stick on the main river. I'm operating on some of the tributaries, where the—er—where the pickings are better."

"Oh, yes? Where?"

"Almost a thousand miles farther up, as the river runs. And, by the way, how do you plan to get up the river from here?"

"Oh, charter a boat." Hammond's lips tightened as he found the questioning turned back on him.

"Uh-huh. A *piragua*. That's a sailboat, you know. Now that the dry season is on, no steamer runs above this town. And your *piragua* can sail only as far as the Atures rapids, about four hundred miles up from here. Then what will you do about getting on up the Alto Orinoco? And how will you even get to Atures with a local crew, when you don't speak the language?"

"I do speak it!" Hammond flushed again, resentfully. "I've studied Spanish a year—"

"Venezuelan Spanish?"

"Spanish," obdurately maintained the Northerner. "I—ah—I did get a bit mixed at the custom house, because French comes more readily to me. But I'll get on. Don't trouble yourself about me."

Unexpectedly he arose, to stand a second, stiff and straight, mouth and eyes hard with displeasure.

"Thank you for your interest, Mr. Thomas," he added, his tone formal. Then with a cool nod, punctilious but perfunctory, he stepped back into his sweltering room and closed the door.

For an instant Thomas glared. Then he shrugged.

"And that, as David remarked to Goliath after socking him with the stone, is that," he whimsically muttered. "Well, all right. Mr. Thomas, you nosey old thing, let's consider ourself slapped on the wrist and go take a rest. And, Señor Jamón, God be with you! You're likely to need Him."

And he sauntered to his own room, closed the window shutters against the westward creeping sun, removed coat and collar, loosened his belt, lay down and passed into peaceful siesta.

CHAPTER V

SHOWDOWN

DURING the next day or two Hammond seemed much preoccupied at meal hours. At other times he and Thomas seldom met. But for the fact that seats at table were designated by the señora, who customarily placed outlanders at the same small

board, they would have had no conversation at all. As it was, each spoke occasionally on trivial subjects, neither asking nor revealing any confidences.

At breakfast they never came together. Hammond, always dilatory at the morning meal, found the place opposite him bare, as if his tablemate had already gone. True enough, he had. But Thomas had not eaten on the balcony. Up at the first light, he had taken *desayuno* in his own room, where it was served on a tray, in West Indies style, by the tall dark waitress who always smiled at him; and before the gallery breakfasters gathered he had departed into the coolness of morning out of doors. By noon, such business as he had in mind was done, and he was free to doze through the hours of fiercest heat—to disappear again after sunset and talk to local men who, like himself, had rested in the afternoon.

The younger man, on the contrary, began his meal when nearly every one else had finished; ate it with extreme deliberation; then sat smoking and gazing at nothing, regardless of the resentful gaze of the waitress, who dared not hasten the departure of a señor, yet was delayed in completion of her work by his tardiness.

When, at midforenoon or later, he emerged into the street, betook himself to the business section and met other brown or yellow or cream skinned folk, his gaze passed over them, also, as if they were inanimate. And when, near the Royal Bank of Canada, he chanced to see Thomas chatting pleasantly with a portly man of Spanish features but almost black skin, his lips turned slightly downward and his nod of greeting was barely perceptible. He never learned that the nearly black man was a politician whose influence, though concealed, was far more weighty on the Orinoco than that of the president of the United States of North America.

In the afternoons, while Thomas rested, Hammond walked along the waterfront, visited the business house which was partly supported by the salary of a seldom present American consular agent, or wandered in other parts of the town. At the riverside he observed several one masted sailing vessels, all proudly flying the Venzuelan flag at the masthead, and in various stages of disrepair; also one small, dirty gasoline launch which obviously had not been in operation for some time. From the sleepy mestizos who acted as watchmen of these craft he obtained virtually no information as to their owners, destinations, or dates of departure. They seemed unutterably stupid; not only unable to comprehend his Spanish, but unwilling to try to. Such answers as he could evoke from them were brief and unintelligible.

At the consular agency and the custom house he fared little better, except that the treatment accorded him was more courteous. By frequent references to his vest pocket vocabulary he succeeded in making himself understood, at least in part; but he found himself unable to translate the replies, except for a word here and there. As for accomplishing anything by these laborious talks, he might as well have saved his time and breath. He did not learn that any boat was about to depart upriver until he saw two of the anchored *piraguas*, loaded with men, lift their hooks and set sail. He received only shrugs and blandly evasive words concerning his seized guns. He made, in fact, no progress whatsoever, except the purely physical and utterly useless progress of footwork along hot streets.

RESTLESS, he walked long and far in the grilling heat of afternoon, while others slumbered. Past somnolent shops where clerks drowsed at their counters, along almost deserted streets where the few languid pedestrians ambled on the shady side, up and down the cobbled hills on which traveled only an occasional hanging headed burro, he prowled in aimless meanderings until tired out. At night, when the town became more wakeful and lively, he stayed in his room, sweltering, striving to study his phrase book, finding that the type blurred

and his eyes ached and his brain refused to grasp the meaning of the words. When he surrendered to sleepiness and went to bed he wondered why he was too nervous to gain refreshing rest.

Meanwhile Thomas observed him shrewdly at intervals in the hotel, asked a question or two about him outside, but refrained from disclosure of his conclusions until the third day. That noon he said:

"If you'll pardon a personal remark, friend, you don't look so good. Are you sleeping well?"

"So so."

"Been walking a good deal in the afternoon?"

"Quite a bit."

"Bad for you. I do it myself sometimes, but only when I have to. We Northerners aren't toughened to this Southern sun by generations of ancestors, you know. And even these native sons keep out of it when they can. Why not take your walks in the evening? There's more life then."

"When I get my guns, maybe I shall."

Thomas eyed him quizzically.

"What do you want a gun for?" he asked. "Any one laying for you?"

"No, but—"

Hammond halted there. Thomas laughed softly.

"I see," he nodded. "That shooting at the riverside sticks in your mind. But that was police work, man, and if you knew what those two mongrels had done and intended to do— Well, never mind that. You don't need a gun in this town any more than at home, if as much. Upriver, of course, it's different. But, speaking of guns, how are you coming on with the custom house? And what about your boat?"

The explorer scowled, chewed unnecessarily long on a mouthful of succulent *empanado* and finally confessed:

"I haven't found a boat I liked. The guns are in *status quo*."

He shot a glance to observe the trader's reaction to his Latin phrase. The older man accepted it as ordinary English.

"Any answer yet from Caracas?" he pressed. "You've telegraphed, of course."

The other looked blank.

"Why—er—not personally. I—er—left that to the customs officials."

"Who," drawled Thomas, "will never telegraph. To make it worth their while to stop all guns from coming in, the government allows them forty per cent. of the sale price of all weapons confiscated. So they'll just sit pretty until you get discouraged and go, leaving your guns behind you. Then they'll cash in. And it's not their job to telegraph, anyway. That's up to our dear American consular agency. What's it doing?"

Hammond sat fixed, jaws unmoving, eyes wide, hands unconsciously holding knife and fork poised. Presently he gulped his masticated food, reached to his water glass, drank quickly. Then he resumed eating, his expression troubled.

"PARDON me for prying," Thomas remarked, lifting another forkful of his own meat hash. "I suppose I shouldn't have asked. But, as I said once before, I'm always interested in explorers. It must be wonderful to travel about the world, seeing strange places and people, and always knowing just what to do. Wish I had the brains for that sort of thing."

Deep red crept into the unscarred face. For the first time the gray eyes failed to front the blue ones squarely. Two pairs of jaws munched in unison, and nothing more was said for a time.

"I'll be leaving soon," the tropic veteran then volunteered. "Had my boat put into the water this morning, and as soon as her seams tighten up and the engine is fit I'll be out of here."

A quick stare answered; but no words came.

"When I left here I was somewhat under par and didn't know just when I'd come back, so I had her taken out and put under cover," the voyager gossiped on. "It was a job, but it saved her water pump and undersides. The silt in this river wouldn't do them any good. There's

one other gas boat down here—maybe you've seen it—that will never run again until she's hauled out, taken down and put together again with new parts. A good boat originally, but ruined by neglect."

Hammond frowned at his plate. He had been covetously eying that boat which was now pronounced useless.

"Well, so long." Thomas yawned and pushed back his chair. "I've had enough, and it's time for a snooze."

"Wait a minute, if you don't mind," requested Hammond.

"Oh, all right. Glad to."

"You're going up the river?"

"Away up."

"In a motorboat?"

"Right."

"Is she fast?"

"Fast enough for this river. Faster than anything else on it."

"Well—er—what price for a passenger?"

The boat owner glanced around. Nearby tables were empty.

"That," he said slowly, "depends on the identity of the passenger—and on the nature of his game!"

At the boring impact of his gaze, Hammond's eyes and lips tightened. But now they met that searching scrutiny without evasion.

"Son, your story is too thin," asserted Thomas. "You're no more an explorer than—well, than I am. You don't even know how to start at the game. I've known one or two explorers. I've watched them work. And I've seen other men work who claimed to be explorers, engineers, one thing or another, but who were not. And this is a presidential year down here—the year when revolutions and similar things always break loose, or try to. That's why the gun embargo is so tight just now. And when those things get to going there's always hell to pay along this old river, where the federal control is never too good even at the best of times. And now, a few months before the aforesaid hell will be hitting on all six cylinders, you're trying to get up the aforesaid river, with a queer yarn on your tongue and something else up your sleeve. That may be all right, of course. But unless I'm sure it's all right you can't ride with me. It's not to my interest to assist a troublemaker. Quite the contrary."

A moment of dead silence. Hammond's expression was a complex of astonishment, incredulity, incipient anger.

"And what's more," Thomas struck again, "until the government is satisfied that you're on the level you'll never get your guns back, consuls or no consuls. Maybe you won't even be able to leave town, except to go back to Trinidad on the steamer. You've got to show some better excuse for being here than the words travel and study on your passport. This country has seen too many Northerners come in under false pretenses and stir up trouble to take any chances. Now if you're straight, and if you care to talk straight to me, I can start things humming and get you going *pronto*. Otherwise—"

He shrugged, drew a packet of cigarrillos from his coat, lighted one and laid the others invitingly near his tablemate. The latter, his face a study of varying emotions, mechanically accepted the offer. As he inhaled his first puff of Venezuelan tobacco he suddenly laughed.

"This is rich!" he gurgled. "Don Quixote Hammond, South American revolutionary agent! Ha-ha-ha! Smooth!"

THOMAS made no rejoinder. The man under suspicion drew several more puffs, his expression sobering, his brows drawing down in thought. He looked around him, then met the probing blue gaze squarely.

"I've told you the truth," he declared. "I am here to explore. But—er—not scientifically, but commercially. My work is constructive, though. It's work that ought to help men like you, too, by helping to improve communications along here, and so on. I fancy that they could stand considerable improvement."

"Well, rather! But go on."

"I—I'd like your promise to keep this to yourself, Mr. Thomas, before I go on, providing I satisfy you that I'm honest, I mean."

"You have it."

"Thank you. Well, my real business here is to cruise up the Orinoco and estimate the possibilities of establishing a line of boats to bring out the products of the back country. My father is—ah—heavily interested in a company which handles a number of imports from down here. We'd like to handle more of them; I mean, to get them in greater quantity. But according to the information we have, the river shipping is wretchedly inadequate. Also, the products pass through the hands of so many middlemen before they reach us that we pay more than we'd like to.

"And I dare say the chaps who actually gather those products get almost nothing for them. What we'd like to do is to establish a dependable line of bottoms to fetch the stuff out, pay the real workers a rather better price, put our own agency here to receive the cargoes, and ship them directly home, via Trinidad, on the regular ocean steamers. That would give us more stuff at lower cost.

"We'll start in a rather small way at first, in order to test out the working of the thing. If it works well we'll expand operations. If it doesn't we'll end them. But before we start, dad wants me to look over the route and see what the difficulties may be. He's a bit too old to do it himself and he won't rely on the report of any employee. He's had experience with field men who brought in false reports. But he knows nobody can bribe me. So here I am.

"I'm a sort of scout, you see—or a business explorer—on a rather secret mission. Until I make my report we shall not approach the Venezuelan government on the matter. If my report is adverse we shall not approach it at all. I am to see things with my own eyes and form my own judgment without pressure from interested parties or persons. That's why I have no papers that would give me away."

Thomas slowly nodded, evidently thinking hard. His lips opened, as if he were about to disclose some formidable obstacle to the success of such a project; but they closed again without words. Hammond, after another puff at the thick paper cylinder of tobacco, added:

"I though it would be rather interesting to do some exploring on my own while I was here, after finishing the business end of the trip. I've grown a bit bored by the usual line of travel—Europe, and all that. So I came prepared for Indian trading and so on."

THE TRADER remained silent. A slight smile passed over his pitted face and was gone. For a moment he regarded the other with eyes half quizzical, half kindly. Suddenly he asked—

"Been in business long?"

"Er, no," admitted Hammond. "I was at college until six months ago."

"What college, if I may ask?"

"Harvard."

"I rather thought so." The little smile recurred. "Well, Hammond of Harvard, you have no papers at all to prove your yarn?"

"Not one!"

The firm jaw set defiantly. The eyes of the two locked. Then Thomas laughed.

"So far as I'm concerned, you don't need any," he announced. "I knew perfectly well that you were no gun runner, but I had to smoke you out. The government might not be so easily satisfied as I am, but there's a way of getting around that. If you'll just play up to my lead for the next few days, this is what will happen: Your guns will come out of hock *pronto*. And when I start up the Orinoco you'll ride with me, as my assistant. And the trip won't cost you one bolívar unless you want to go farther than I do, and I rather doubt that. Does the general idea suit you?"

Hammond swallowed. His face shone.

"Why, that's damn' decent of you," he gulped.

"Not a bit. I'm sold on your idea of developing trade here. And it's a long, lonely ride up the Orinoco, and I'd like to have a white man go with me as far as he likes to go. If you don't mind taking the

nominal position of assistant, with nothing to do but hold the wheel now and then when I get tired—"

"Driving a motorboat is my favorite sport."

"Good! By the way, what's your first name? Two men traveling on this river have no use for 'misters'."

"Ferdinand—" the younger man looked sheepish—"but don't call me Ferdy!"

"Well, mine's Dwight; but don't call me that, either. From now on we're Ham and Tom, if it's all the same to you. And now let's get over to my room and work out details."

"All right—Tom."

Two hands quickly gripped. Two chairs scraped. Two men, hitherto almost strangers, arose and walked away as one.

CHAPTER VI

SOUNDINGS

BEFORE sunset the stagnated affairs of Ferdinand Hammond had begun to move in purposeful flow.

Following a conference about an hour long in Thomas' airy room, the older man went to the hotel telephone and spoke incisively to invisible listeners in three different places. In a more genial tone, he then conversed a few minutes with somebody else in a fourth place. Hammond, listening, made little of the words he heard; but it was evident that the fourth person was some one with authority or influence. As the talker hung up the the receiver he announced:

"Wires now start working to pull your guns out of the soft but sticky clutch of the forty-percenters; also, no less important, to secure full, formal permission for you to carry them anywhere you like. That stops any upriver governor or *jefe* or other official who may covet said guns from seizing them. So far, so good. Now, Ham, you go and take your siesta. Oh yes, you'll sleep. Leave your door open, shut your eyes, forget everything. You'll pass out in no time. I'm going to get mine right now. So long."

When the new "assistant" followed the advice of his nominal chief he found it good. Sleep engulfed him. After the unrefreshing nights just past, body and brain demanded recuperation. His nerves, untortured by afternoon sun, readily relaxed; and his mind, hitherto subconsciously troubled by the recent stalemate of his plans, now felt entirely at ease. Consequently he lost consciousness with surprising rapidity, not to regain it for hours. When he awoke he found Thomas, coatless and collarless, lounging in his one chair and serenely smoking.

"Good boy!" approved the trader. "You've been out three hours by the clock. Now it's time for your bath."

Hammond, still sleepy, blinked at his wrist watch. His visitor gave that diminutive dial a sardonic glance.

"I get my bath in the—oh-ho-hum—in the morning," yawned Hammond.

"Northern stuff," was the scoffing retort. "Down here, out on the river, anyway, you'll take it just before sundown. That's when you need it, after the heat of the day, to reduce your temperature and take the sun out of your nerves. In the morning the first thing you'll do will be to drink coffee, hot and black, to knock out any fever that's crept into you in the night. And that wrist-watch of yours, by the way, had better stay here in your trunks, with most of the other junk you brought. It looks like a good one, but a cheap pocket watch is worth a dozen of it. Why? Because the first time you shove your hand into the river for something, which you shouldn't do, but will before long, your strap watch will be ruined by water in just half a second. Pack it away, and forget it until you come back."

"You mean that I'm not to take my trunks?" The explorer's tone grew truculent.

The river traveler looked at the five big trunks crowding the room and chuckled.

"Those Noah's arks? Not even one of them, Ham, old thing. You'd need an ocean going barge to carry them. But now toddle along to your shower, while

there's still some water in the tank. It's pumped up here only once a day, and late bathers get only two drops and a wheeze."

"That's one drop more than most of these spiggoties use," grumpily opined the newcomer.

Thomas eyed him with disapproval.

"I'd hardly say that," he differed. "And after you've seen more of them I doubt if you'll say it, either. And I'd drop that word 'spiggoties' out of my vocabulary if I were you."

"Really! And if I don't, what then?"

"You won't get on so well. The word itself is a bad one to use down here, and the mental attitude of a man who uses it is worse, and likely to lead him into trouble. A fellow usually gets what he gives. Give these chaps dislike, and you'll get it back again—with heavy interest."

"Humph! Well, I've seen nothing in these people yet to make me admire them. In fact, I consider them as contemptible as —as—" he searched for a comparison sufficiently scornful "as Yale men!"

The upriver man, scanning his peevish face, snickered.

"That's a horrible knock, I must say. Yale men are a lowdown lot, aren't they?"

"There's nothing lower."

Thomas chuckled anew, blew a ring of smoke, looked reminiscent.

"Well, probably you know more about them than I do, Ham. But I used to know a couple of chaps who had gone to Yale, and I thought they weren't half bad."

"Tastes differ."

"Yes, that's true. Mine may be degraded. However, if you're going to snatch that bath before some despicable spiggoty uses up all the water you'd better be moving. *Hasta luego.*"

THOMAS arose and sauntered out, grinning widely. Hammond sat a moment frowning after him; then seized towel and soap and wended his way to the *baño* beneath the balcony. Three minutes under the single shower there transformed hot irritation into cool good humor.

When he repassed the door of his counselor he hesitated, half inclined to make amends for his crossness. Then he went on, wordless. But when he met Thomas again at table his wrist watch was no longer semi-visible under his left cuff. And, though he still ignored the merry Venezuelans at the other tables, he thereafter refrained from referring to them as spiggoties.

That evening he strolled for a time along the nearby streets, alone, unarmed, alert to the approach of any soft footed figure, but not unduly wary. Nobody accosted him, except one or two mestiza girls who called softly from shadowy doorways and a slightly intoxicated man of middle age who, considerably to his surprise, very politely murmured in passing—

"*Buen' noche', señor.*"

To none of these greetings, amorous or merely amiable, did he reply. But when he returned to the hotel he realized that a visiting señor did not need firearms to insure his safety in the streets of Bolívar after dark, at least, so long as he conducted himself as a señor should. And when he retired, after writing a letter or two, he slept more peacefully than on any previous night.

"You're looking better," Thomas informed him the next morning when they chanced to meet on the Paseo.

"I'm feeling better," he acknowledged. "Slept like a log last night."

"I thought you would. And tonight you'll sleep like two logs. The fellow in the room next to me left this morning, and I've reserved it for you. You'll find the air much better."

"Why, thanks for your trouble. But I'd have gotten it anyway. I told the señora—"

"To give you the first vacancy on the street side. Of course. Every dark room inmate does that. But she didn't tell you of the vacancy, did she? Not much. Those dark rooms are the hardest to let, and when a victim is settled in one of them he can stay there. Well, let's go and look at the boat."

THEY walked to the sand shored upper port of the city, which, at the present low stage of the water, was used as anchorage only by shallow draft boats. There, as Hammond peered at the craft in which he was to cruise, his brows drew down in disappointment.

Accustomed to smart, expensive motorboats at home, he had subconsciously expected to find one of similar type, a natural mahogany hull, double cockpit, piano hatched engine amidships, automobile top and lines boasting high speed. He saw a dull gray cargo carrier, weatherworn, stained, peeling paint, with dingy awning and long mosquito wired cockpit. She looked even worse than the neglected gas boat near her, which, Thomas had said, would not run. Moreover, she seemed suicidally topheavy.

"That?" he disparagingly inquired.

"That," echoed the owner. "Not what you expected, eh? But wait till you've been through what she has, and maybe you'll look worse than she does. She's served two years in country where no motorboat ever went before and she's still good."

The younger man scanned her anew, beginning to perceive that the bow flare indicated staunch seaworthiness, that the heavy looking top was really too light to unbalance the hull, even when the boat was empty, and that the long cockpit afforded far more room than would two luxuriously cushioned seating spaces separated by a brass handled hatch.

"Take off that top and paint her white, and she'd look quite decent," he conceded.

"She'll never be white while I run her. She's painted gray with malice aforethought, so to speak. A white target is much easier to hit than a gray one. As for the clumsy wire top, you'll soon learn the use of that."

A startled look overspread Hammond's face. He saw again two bodies sprawled at the end of a gangplank and a cold eyed killer poised in merciless menace.

"A target?" he echoed.

"Folks upriver are a little careless sometimes," was the insouciant reply. "There are a few .44 bullet holes in that hull, neatly plugged up, though, if I do say it, and several dents in the planking made by arrow heads. The arrows had poison on them, by the way. But don't be alarmed. I'm still here, you may notice, and there's not a bullet scar nor an arrow mark on me—yet. And I've been in places where you won't go. Well, let's ramble back to the hotel. It's nearly time for chow."

AS THEY moved away the trader eyed his partner sidewise. The latter was soberly debating something in his mind. The wrinkles at the corners of the blue eyes deepened, and the ghost of a frown drew down the blond brows. Had that revelation of lurking dangers upstream moved the scout to consider abandoning his journey? Was he yellow?

They had gone several rods before Hammond revealed his thoughts.

"I fail to see why there's no room for my trunks in that long launch."

The answering chuckle was compounded of amusement and relief.

"Wait until she's loaded, Ham, and if you can see space for even one trunk then you'll have better eyes than mine."

"All right."

During the rest of their walk a little smile remained on the mustached lips. Manifestly no intention of quitting his mission had entered Hammond's mind. Moreover, his abstinence from argument concerning the trunks, as well as his previous adoption of suggestions made by the more experienced man, betokened a growing reliance on the judgment of his shorter companion which augured well for amicable relations during the forthcoming voyage.

"Men are four," muttered Thomas.

"What?" Hammond looked at him questioningly.

"Nothing." Several steps more. Then, repenting of his short reply, "I was just thinking of a proverb. You've heard it, no doubt:

"Men are four:

"He who knows, and knows that he knows. He is wise. Follow him.

"He who knows, and knows not that he knows. He is asleep. Wake him.

"He who knows not, and knows that he knows not. He is a child. Teach him.

"He who knows not, and knows not that he knows not. He is a fool. Avoid him."

"Oh," said Hammond. "Yes, I've heard that. Er—where do I stand in that category? Not first. But, I hope, not last."

"You're right both times."

With that ambiguous answer Thomas grew taciturn. They toiled up a block of steep, sun smitten street while Hammond considered the alternatives. Then, moved by sudden impulse, he exclaimed:

"You have a good education, Tom, for a trader. And your memory's better than mine."

"Thanks." dryly. "But must a trader necessarily be uneducated?"

"Er—why, no, of course not. But—" He caught his tongue, embarrassed by his uncomplimentary inference. The blue eyes regarded him satirically. Something he glimpsed in them made him stop dead, a queer thought streaking through his mind.

"I say! Are you a Harvard man?"

"Not guilty."

Thomas walked straight on. Hammond stared after him, bit his lip, followed, saying no more. At the door of his room the upriver man paused to look at him again, eyes filled with mysterious mirth.

"I've been accused of many things," he bantered, "but never before of that! However, Ham, old dear, you're improving all the time. In fact, your perceptivity is merging into perspicacity, if not precocity."

The door closed behind him. Through its slats sounded a chuckle.

"Now what the devil," plaintively inquired the recent college graduate, "do you mean?"

"Never mind. We'll get on."

Hammond left it at that.

CHAPTER VII

A LITTLE TRADE

LOW RIDING, heavy laden, the nameless gray boat with sun peeled paint surged out into the Orinoco waves and began spurning them behind her.

From the decks of anchored *piraguas*, from the edge of the high waterfront street, idle men viewed her departure and exchanged pessimistic predictions. She would be swamped; she would wreck herself on a rock; she would explode and vanish in flame. And the Norte Americanos were going to death. If not drowned, devoured by crocodiles, or burned, they would be slain by rebels or bandits or savages or fever or—well, by something. With this cheerful prophecy they watched her recede westward and fade from sight, still unswamped, unwrecked, unexploded. Then, with dark shakes of dark heads, they relegated her to her unknown fate and forgot her.

In the cramped wheel space under the fore end of the awning sat two men, steadily watching ahead. Thomas, khaki shirted, baggy trousered, sockless and sandaled, peered through dark lensed spectacles at the rolling array of westward sweeping waves, with occasional glances at small variations in the low shore scenery—a few palm thatched huts here, an almost imperceptible gap in the greenery there, where some smaller stream slid into the master river. His silk cap, pulled down tight, again protected his thin haired crown from breezes. His helmet, unnecessary while he rode under the sun balking awning, dangled by its chin strap from the back of his folding chair, ready for use if he should go ashore. Peacefully sucking at an unlit black pipe, he held the small, service worn steering wheel with the confident ease of a driver who knew both his vessel and his course.

Hammond, bare headed, khaki clad, but silk socked and tennis shoed, leaned forward in his seat and gravely watched water and land. One hand held a leather bound note book, in which, from time to time, he jotted a brief entry with a silver

pencil. Eyes unprotected by glare softening glasses looked between lids instinctively contracted. His white helmet, which, with its green underbrim, might have lessened the strain of vision, lay on a stout canvas bag behind him. That bag, with a couple of boxes, constituted all his luggage. As Thomas had predicted, he was carrying not one trunk.

The cargo which crammed the rest of the cockpit and weighted the hull perilously low consisted of oblong cans, each holding five gallons of gasoline. They covered even the box hatch housing the sturdy engine amidships; and the contingency of a stoppage of the motor, necessitating a shifting of cans in order to give access to it, was one of which the passenger preferred not to think. The placid driver evidently had such confidence in his motive power that he gave it no thought whatever. Holding the mileage down to approximately ten an hour, he cruised with the twin purposes of evading submerged rocks and conserving fuel.

"IT'S A long way from here to where I'm going," he had said before starting, "and there are no gas stations on the way. Sometimes gasoline can be had at Caicara, two hundred miles up, but not always. And down in this country you learn to take what you can get while you can get it, and rely on nobody but yourself. So I jam her with every drop she'll carry at the start. In fact, that's why I use this long, open type of boat—to have room for the fuel to drive her. Even this much isn't enough to keep me going long after I reach the upper river. I have a lot more shipped up on *piraguas* for my use in running about up there and coming down again."

"But where's your cargo of trade stuff?" wondered Hammond. "If you use the boat only to carry fuel to drive the boat that—er—"

"The boat that carries the fuel that drives the boat that carries the fuel that drives the boat, and so on without end," laughed Thomas. "A perfect example of the vicious circle. That's just what it comes to. But it also comes to this. This boat gets me up into my country in a couple of weeks instead of a couple of months, and so I can work while my—ah—trade stuff comes along after me. There's a rainy season down here, you know, and its a tough one while it works, and a man has to do all he can in the dry time—which is not so very dry, in the upper part. My other stuff has already gone; I sent it on a *piragua* last week. We'll pass it on the way, and it will arrive several weeks after I do."

"I could have sent a trunk or two if I'd known," Hammond could not help regretting. To which Thomas rejoined:

"You could. But remember that you'll have to come back alone—unless you stick with me longer than I think you will—and you may have to travel in a dugout canoe, as I've done many a time. And there's no room for your Noah's arks in one of those things. Take nothing you don't need. If you'll let me pick what you do need, you'll find it takes up little space."

"Why do you think I won't stick with you long?" challenged Hammond.

"You can't, if you do your duty. You're here on business. As soon as you've seen what you're here to see, it's up to you to get back to Bolívar and take your report home. That's the only way to be sure it will get there. The mails down here are loose as ashes. If, after you've explored your Orinoco, you want to come back and see something rougher and wilder, I can show it to you. But right now you're a scout, and a scout's first duty is to fulfill his mission and report back to his commanding officer."

And now, with his trunks left behind at the hotel, Hammond rode up the Orinoco with only a hammock for a bed, a mosquito bar, a few changes of clothing, a camera and films, a shaving kit, two cases of preserved food, tobacco, guns and ammunition. His high power rifle, with his partner's large calibered but short range repeater, stood within arm's length of the steering wheel. Each man's sidearm was in its holster, fully loaded, but

hanging from a belt carelessly looped over the back of a chair.

The steady purr of the motor exhaust was lost in the swash of waves and the thin hiss of quartering wind through the copper mosquito wire, which, as yet, was useless, since no insects were to be met here in midstream. Up and down, easy as a rocking chair, the boat bobbed over the swells, the far shores seeming to move downstream with snaillike slowness, yet steadily creeping behind. At times a wave curled its crest over the low gunwale, stealthily sneaking water into the burdened craft and adding to its weight. Yet, minute by minute, the hull was rising imperceptibly as the fuel in the tank flowed into the cylinders, became gas and vanished. Thus boat and river fenced with each other, while the men forward gazed intently ahead.

Hammond, viewing the broad yellow stream, thought it wide enough to carry an armada of heavily loaded ships. And so it was. Yet he knew, from previous conversations with his driver, that it was deceitfully shallow at this time of year. Only in the wet season, when it rose thirty feet or more, could it carry deep draught vessels safely to Bolívar, according to Thomas. And the statement was proved true by the trader's glances at landmarks which would serve to direct the course of his own small craft, as well as by the absence of other shipping. Occasionally the watcher descried, near one bank or the other, a dugout canoe, which drew only a few inches of water. Once they passed, at some distance, a small *piragua* which seemed fixed on the river and which actually was aground on some invisible sand shoal. No other floating craft showed. The small steamers which, at deepwater time, traveled some two or three hundred miles up this river of unknown length—these were absent now, and would remain absent for months hence. Even the sailing *piraguas*, he had learned, were built with flat keels; and recently he had seen one of these stuck. At length he scribbled in his note book—

Ships must be shallow draught.

Later, after looking back at the weighty, expensive cargo of gasoline and then contemplating the endless line of trees on either shore, he added—

Use wood burning engines.

Thomas, glancing sidewise, glimpsed these notes. His face remained expressionless. But in his eyes flickered a smile, and through his mind flitted the thought:

"I was right. The kid has a good head."

They surged onward.

THE WIDE river, ever turning, led them sometimes northwestward, sometimes southwestward, yet always west. Now and then a yellowish hut showed against the eternal greenery. Nearer, an infrequent sandy *playa* lifted its bare expanse a foot or two above the water—a section of the river bed, exposed now to the sun, tenanted only by harsh voiced birds which, rising and wheeling on the breeze, scolded the passing boat. At long intervals a thing which looked like a blunt stub drifting in the current sank from sight, thereby proving itself to be the head of a floating turtle. Once, with a suddenness which made Hammond jump and Thomas dart a hand to the reverse lever, a huge fish erupted from the undulating surface, turned in air, and plunged back into its element with creamy splash. Otherwise nothing new came into the changeless hours of cruising.

At length Thomas edged the bow slightly to starboard. On a long slant, the boat swam to the northern shore, slowing as she neared a couple of huts, before which lay tethered a humble *curial* —dugout canoe. Through his shaded lenses the driver keenly surveyed the two shelters. A boy came out and stood staring down from the top of the shelving bank. Thomas surveyed him, also; then brought the boat to a deft stop, bow resting on sand.

"According to my eyes, stomach and engine, it's noon," he judged.

Hammond reached into a shirt pocket, whence he drew the little watch which had formerly adorned a wrist strap.

"Humph! Still carrying that? Well, if you want to keep it you'd better hitch it to your buttonhole by a cord," advised Thomas. "What does it say?"

"Four minutes to twelve. How the deuce do you guess so closely?"

"By consulting the original timepiece up yonder." A thumb pointed toward the sun. "Learn to read sun shadows, lad, and you'll need no watch in daylight. Well, let's lighten cargo a bit."

They donned helmets. Hammond reached also for his gun belt, but a headshake dissuaded him. Emerging through the small door which gave egress through the screen, they carefully funneled a canful of fuel into the partly depleted tank. Holding the empty tin, Thomas then turned to the watchful native boy, beside whom now stood a short, swarthy, barefoot man. Casually he asked a question in vernacular.

"*Sí, sí!*" came quick response.

The boy trotted eagerly down the shore, seized the big can, lifted it to his head, toiled upward with it. The man withdrew to the nearer hut. Thomas waited. Soon the man returned, bearing a large gourd.

"Get plates and spoons, Ham," directed Thomas.

Hammond, after a glance at the contents of the gourd, reentered the boat, returning with two deep enamelware plates and large spoons. From the calabash Thomas apportioned equal shares of food which heaped the plates high; wet food which seemed a mixture of rice, beans and fish, with a few chunks of meat.

"*Sancocho*," he enlightened his partner, who was critically eying the mess, "or South American slum. Good. Try it."

Wherewith he squatted expertly and ate. Hammond, after a tentative taste, took a full spoonful and thereafter ate with enjoyment. The donor, squatting a few feet away, grinned at the two señores, absently caressed the hilt of a bare machete belted at his waist and, when prompted by a few questions from Thomas, talked in quick bursts of speech which continued by their own momentum. When the trader finished eating and tendered a cigarillo, he accepted it gratefully. Under the influence of the free tobacco he became even more loquacious.

Thomas listened until his own cigaret had burned to a tiny stub. Then, with a measuring glance at the shadow of the still standing Hammond, he arose, handed the native a fresh cigaret, and stepped waterward. A quick wash of dish and spoon, and he crawled in through the screened doorway. Hammond, wordless, followed.

WHEN the boat backed off its soft berth and danced away up the river the native still crouched in the sun, blissfully smoking his second cigarillo and smilingly watching the diminishing hull.

"Now, if you'd been alone, Ham, what would you have done with that can?" queried Thomas.

"Thrown it into the river."

"And what would you have eaten?"

"Something out of the box."

"Just so. But now our tummies are full of nourishing food, our friend back yonder is happy with his new can, our own grub is still untouched and I have some valuable information. Total expenditure, about one cent's worth of cigarets. Total profit, about a thousand per cent. Moral: Never throw away a thing you can't use down here. Give it to some poor devil who can use it. And don't be too high hatted to talk to that poor devil. He may know more about some things than you do, and the knowledge he has may be invaluable to you."

"For instance?"

"For instance, there's a bad gang or two operating along here just now—came down from the north a couple of days ago. They call themselves revolutionists, and maybe they are. More likely, they're just a bunch of cutthroats. In either case, they'd love to capture our boat, plunder us and use the boat for raiding along the

river. And if we objected—*blam-blam!*—two more North Americans bit the dust. So tonight we'll sleep on the south shore instead of the north, as we might have done."

"We might do a bit of blamming ourselves, don't you think?"

Hammond looked rather wistfully at his untried rifle. The river veteran grinned.

"We might, but what's the use if we don't have to? We're not down here to make the country safe for democracy. Let the government do that, if it can. We're business men."

For a time no more was said. Then Hammond inquired—

"What good was that empty can to that fellow?"

"A can, a bottle, or anything else that can't be bored into by worms or bugs is worth a lot to these chaps. Even a cheap wood box, which will be eaten up eventually but will last a while, is more than welcome. Do you realize, Ham, that, with great forests full of the finest timber—mahogany, ebony, a score of other varieties of valuable and almost indestructible woods—there's not a sawmill to cut a plank, or a board, or a slat, on all this Orinoco? Then how are the people to get boxes?"

A brief silence. Then Thomas broke forth:

"And that's not all. It's the same way all through. This downriver section is great cattle country. Hides are cheap as dirt. But try to get a pair of shoes, or even a belt, and see what price you'll pay. Why? Because there's no leather manufactory. The hides are shipped abroad, the leather goods reimported. It's the same with rubber, with almost everything else. It's a country of raw materials; and most of the raw materials, even, go to rot, unused. Lack of communications, lack of manufacturing facilities, lack of statesmen with vision enough to develop the country—though there's no lack, God knows, of grasping, grafting politicians—these are what hold back everything, strangle every chance of progress. And the people know it. The poor, dumb devils who have no education, no money, no clothes except a few rags, no food except what they can raise or catch, and then gladly give to señores like us for an empty can—they know what's the matter, and in their groping way they try to remedy things by supporting every new revolution, hoping for something better. That's a mistake, but it shows that they want to improve. And if you could put into effect this idea of your dad's and open up this back country you'd find them ready to help you. But—"

He stopped, jaws clamped tight. The boat leaped into higher speed, tore recklessly through the opaque water, then slowed to its former sensible pace. Thomas had yanked the throttle to full opening, as if to relieve feelings which he did not wish to voice.

"But what?" then probed Hammond.

"You'll see."

With that Thomas fell silent.

Hammond, frowning, gazed ahead, seeing only the same monotonous scene; low shores, yellow water, glaring sunlight growing worse as it fell with steadily westering slant.

His companion's unexpected display of feeling puzzled him. The trader, hitherto casual, cynical, satirical, sarcastic, who had done a poor river dweller out of a double meal by giving him a discarded can and two cheap cigarets, now had shown strong sympathy for that humble Orinocan and all his untutored class. True, that can was useful, perhaps valuable, to the recipient, as was the comfort of the tobacco. But a little money would have been more precious, Hammond thought. Or would it? Was the possession of something the hut-dweller could use, the honor of talking companionably to a white señor, worth more to him than a couple of bolivares far from a town where he could spend them? Perhaps. Certainly he had acted appreciative. And, all questions of ethics aside, the news which he had so freely imparted, news which cost him nothing and which he enjoyed

giving, was well worth acquisition.

For some time Hammond sat thinking. Then he scribbled in his notebook—

Company should cultivate friendship of spig—

His hand halted, leaded out the incomplete word, wrote instead—

—river people

The eyes behind the dark lenses smiled once more.

CHAPTER VIII

OFF THE MAP

SUNSET found the launch tied to a snag projecting from the clay bank of the south shore. Its master and its passenger were gone. Near it clustered several curious loafers, exchanging occasional comments or conjectures concerning its appearance, safety, speed and cargo. None carried his curiosity so far as to board it, however; for on the edge of the earth lounged a stalwart, hard featured mestizo who looked not only able but willing to inflict on any meddler treatment exceedingly painful. While he kept lazy but efficient watch, the foreign señores who were to give him some cigarrillos on their return were visiting the small, straggling town a gunshot farther inland—Moitaco.

In a simply, yet tastefully furnished room of a long, low clay house Hammond sat with mingled feelings. He was surprised to know that any town was here; for the American map he had brought with him showed no human habitation on the southern shore between Ciudad Bolívar and Caicara, a distance of some two hundred miles. Yet here was a village, the weathered house walls of which proved it to be by no means newly settled; and, from casual remarks of Thomas, he knew there must be others; and by using his own eyes he had learned that there were also many little individual *sitios*, like the one where he had eaten at noon. Evidently the North American makers of maps had something to learn. Certainly this populated downriver region was not the barren waste he had imagined it to be.

Nor was it peopled entirely by such poor, uneducated folk as the cheerful donor of the *sancocho*. For here, in the room with him and Thomas, sat a tall, languid white Spaniard whose clothing and cordial courtesy were better than his own, and whose Spanish was so good that he could readily understand it; Spanish of the type he had heard in the college classroom, except that its sibilants more nearly approximated the American clearness than the Castilian lisp. His ability to comprehend the lazy syllables filled him with a pleasant glow. So did the Spaniard's easy familiarity, with an almost imperceptible but flattering hint of deference. For the first time since his arrival in this new country, he felt that he had met an equal, a gentleman by birth and breeding. It was all the more pleasing, because it was so unexpected, to find such a man in such a place, in a town which, according to the map, did not exist.

As he sat and listened to the easy flowing talk, however, he wondered a little at the affability of this newly met host toward him and his breezy partner. Despite the obscurity of his tiny town and the simplicity of his own abode, this man was patently an aristocrat and habitually an autocrat. He would, Hammond felt, be exceedingly haughty toward any one whom he considered an inferior. Why, then, should he accord such civility to a petty river trader, and also to the assistant of that trader? And why should others have done likewise before now?

At Ciudad Bolívar, since his acceptance of nominal subordination to Thomas, the young Northerner had received courteous greetings from high headed citizens who previously had ignored his existence. Yet traders were ordinarily held in no esteem by upper class Venezuelans. Just why the influential men of this river should treat Thomas as a compeer, and show to a supposed employee of his more

cordiality than to an idle young gentleman presumably his social superior—this problem seemed inexplicable. However, he had given it only momentary thought at intervals; and now, though the question recurred to him, he speedily forgot it in listening and in framing replies to remarks occasionally addressed to him.

THOMAS, speaking Spanish much more correct than the slipshod vernacular which he usually employed, carried the main burden of the conversation. He touched on such news of world affairs as he had acquired during his stay in Trinidad, retailed various reports of national matters current in Bolívar, mentioned the activity of raiders on the north shore, discussed with his host the most recent rumors of other guerrilla forays, a point on which the lounging Spaniard seemed very well informed. Then, prompted by questions, he spoke of conditions in his own upriver country, which was evidently very wild.

He mentioned queer rivers which, Hammond was sure, were not named on maps —Manapiare, Hacha, Iurebe, Camani, Erevato and other strange streams—and Indian tribes equally new to a Northern ear, such as Yabaranos, Curachicanos, Taparitos, Uayungomos. He spoke, too, of natural products, *balata, caucho, sarrapia, bejuca cadena,* other growths which might be handled commercially with profit. Some of these latter names were already known to the business explorer, while some were new.

To all this the host listened with unmistakable interest which, however, seemed free from any intent of personal investment or gain. At length he seriously remarked—

"You have it in your power to become very wealthy up there, if you give the proper attention to the business."

"Perhaps, *mañana,*" smiled Thomas.

The other laughed, surveyed him keenly a second and nodded.

"You are a sly one," he complimented.

"Perhaps," repeated Thomas, noncommittedly. "*Quién sabe?*"

Hammond listened uncomprehendingly. The words were plain, but not the meaning which seemed clear to these two. Thomas was being good naturedly accused of some covert design, and was not denying it. If that purpose was what the words apparently implied, to enrich himself through handling the products he had discovered, why need there be any secrecy about it? A trader would obviously have that motive.

"Well," concluded Thomas, rising, "time passes. We must go."

AND, IN thick darkness, they went, after polite formalities of leave taking. Thomas lingered behind his companion for a moment, however, and in that moment a few low words passed between him and the Spaniard. As he picked his way down toward the riverfront by aid of a small electric torch he hummed softly to himself.

"A fine chap, that," Hammond declared.

"Yes, and absolutely worthless," was the surprising reply.

"What?"

"No good. Well born, well bred, well educated, proud as Lucifer—and no good. Not worth the powder to blow him to hell. Otherwise he'd be there."

"Er, I don't exactly follow you."

"You will, when I tell you. He used to be a general in the local army. When the last serious revolt happened along he took his men upriver, went into camp across a small creek from the rebels, stayed there two weeks, talked to the rebel commander, let him and his patriots turn back and march north into Guárico, where they had come from, and then withdrew, without firing a shot."

"Why, the damn' coward!" exploded Hammond.

"That's what President Gomez said when he heard about it. And that's why Gomez dismissed him in disgrace, and why he is now living on nothing but his pride in a place like this. But it wasn't cowardice. 'Twas just sheer laziness. That chap is afraid of nothing that walks,

swims, crawls, or flies. But it was too much work to fight a battle in the hot sun, so he talked instead. And his talk turned back the rebels, saved the towns farther down from capture, saved men and cartridges—in short, saved the situation, as far as this section was concerned. But of course Gomez expects his generals to fight his enemies, and you can't blame him for that. And this chap would have fought, too, if he hadn't been too lazy. And when you find a white Spaniard, of his proud caste, who is too lazy to fight, then you've found the absolute acme of laziness."

"If he's as useless as that, why did we waste time on him?"

His pilot, spraying light along the inequalities of the unkempt declivity, withheld answer a minute or two. Then, as they reached a clear space, he replied:

"It wasn't wasted. We might better be enjoying a bit of sociability than sitting in our boat. We'll have little enough of it on the upper river. Also, I wanted to show you another type of Venezuelan, a rare one, I'll admit, because most of them are fighters, but you might as well see all kinds while you can. Also, this fellow is a sort of armchair explorer, interested in the back country where I go, and always eager to hear about it. And also once more, he usually has an uncanny knowledge of whatever revolutionary movements are going on. How he gets his information is a question best left unasked, so I've never asked it. But just as we were leaving he gave me a quiet tip that the climate in two places above here might not be very healthful for travelers at present. So we'll avoid those places and retain our health."

Hammond whistled softly.

"Whe-e-ew! I see. Yes, I see. He's a revolutionist himself, lying low and—"

"*Quién sabe?*" his companion cut him short. "Enough said. Hi! *Guarda!*"

"*Alerto,*" drawled the voice of the watchman. "*Aquí.*"

The big fellow arose from the ground, where he had been lying at ease since the departure of the inquisitive idlers, nonchalantly accepted his meed of cigarets, plus a real to buy a drink; mumbled a good night, and ambled away into the dark. The Americans boarded their craft, bolted the screen door, formed negligent beds with bags and thin blankets on the snugly packed tins and lay down.

AFTER a time Hammond spoke bluntly—

"Say, Tom, are you implicated in this revolutionary game in any way?"

"Hardly. A business man, Ham, attends strictly to his own business."

"Then how did you know that this fellow—" he left the question unfinished.

"I don't know anything about him, except what everybody knows. I've heard a vague rumor or two, that's all."

"Um. Well—er—without wishing to be nosey, you know, I—ah—I've been wondering what deep, dark secret there might be about your getting rich by your trading. He was hinting at something, and—"

He paused again. From the other bed sounded a soft chuckle.

"You're improving, Ham, you're improving. Without making any statements that might tend to incriminate me, I'll just mention the fact that a regular, recognized trader down here has to pay stiff taxes. I don't pay any."

A silence, broken only by the soft plash of small waves against the gently rocking boat.

"Then, you're not known to be a trader?" puzzled Hammond. "What are you supposed to be?"

"My passport, when I first came to this country, gave the same excuse as yours—travel and study."

"What?" The younger man sat up, peering at the dim shape beside him. "Why, say! Are you another explorer, like me?"

Teeth showed in a phantom grin.

"*Quién sabe?*"

A slow laugh welled from the younger throat, becoming more rapid and mirthful.

"Ho-ho-ho! Then we're both in the

same boat, in more ways than one! Why, you damn' sly old hypocrite, you!" Playfully he punched the recumbent figure in the ribs. "I see your whole game now. You're building up a big trade in virgin country, keeping it dark until you're ready to start your stuff out, laying your wires to have everything along the river favorable to you when you do start it, and planning to do the government out of most of the taxes, or all of them! And you're keeping on friendly terms with both sides, federal and rebel, so that you can't lose, no matter what happens. Oh, you slick old fox! Well, say, throw some business to the ships of the Hammond company, won't you? We'll treat you right. Leave it to me!"

"I'll think about it."

Thomas laughed quietly. Hammond lay back, grinning upward at the shadowy awning. The wavelets continued to plash, the cool night breeze played over the partners, the boat swayed languorously in the sleepy waters. Eyes closed.

"Good night, smuggler," said Hammond.

"Good night, explorer."

Then, despite the hardness of their mutual couch, they slept, more comfortably than in the softer but hotter beds of town.

CHAPTER IX

HELL GATE

MORNING. Low, hot sun, steadily climbing. Waves rolling high and dangerous, piled up by a hard counter current wind. A boat wallowing over the snarling crests, jockeyed by a driver whose mouth was set in a hard line and whose hands swung the steering wheel in instinctive semiarcs as she rose or fell. Beside him, a younger man leaning tensely forward, a forgotten notebook lying where it had fallen at his feet, eyes fixed on the heaving waves just ahead.

One error of judgment in meeting one wave would mean swamping and sinking. Both knew it. But neither spoke. The driver, gauging each insensate assailant, encountered its attack with the grim coolness of a veteran of worse fights. The passenger sat in the tense attitude of a man accustomed to driving in rough seas and chafing from enforced inaction. His strain was the greater because of his helpless idleness.

Ahead rose funereal cliffs, seemingly forming a solid wall which the river could penetrate only by some subterranean passage. On either shore lay boulders black as coal, jumbled as if dumped *en masse* from a gigantic barrow. From the water jutted others, scattered at haphazard; and snarling swirls on the surface betrayed the presence of more of them, lurking invisible, ready to smash any unwary hull attempting to speed over them. As the lone boat struggled onward, evading each seen or unseen menace, the river narrowed, flowing with more powerful current through a black gorge; the waters, here shielded somewhat from the wind by the mounting banks, grew less rough, but the serpentine writhings and sucking spins became more forceful. What the leaping water wolves of the surface had been unable to accomplish the stealthy watersnakes below were now striving to effect—to cripple and drag down the man made swimmer which surged onward in their teeth.

"Puerta del Infierno," briefly spoke Thomas. "Hell Gate."

"It looks it!"

Hammond lifted his gaze momentarily from the sinister water to the diabolical shores crowding in. Here and there among the gloomy stretches of rock were dead trees, pallid, shriveled, warped, like gaunt creatures tortured and forever blighted by the heat of hell. Sparse grass patches showed brown, all life burned from the starved stalks. Tall cacti, clawed and fanged, stood grimly ready to tear the flesh of any mortal creature coming within reach. The whole scene was utterly infernal.

"A sweet spot for the ships of Hammond and company," dryly added Thomas.

With that he jerked the prow of his own

vessel away from a suddenly detected rock and shut his lips.

Hammond's sun scowl deepened as he swiftly surveyed the perilous passage again. Then he fixed his gaze once more on the approaching wall of rock.

Abruptly the stream turned. The wall opened. Currents wheeled and swerved, rocks more formidable reared monstrous bodies from opaque depths, but, beyond, the grim banks sank to ordinary shores of clay and the water expanded to wider reaches innocent of stones. A few minutes more of expert steering, then Thomas drew a long breath.

"And that's that," he remarked. "What price ships, Ham?"

"We-e-ell," hesitated the observer, "in high water, when those rocks are submerged—"

"Nothing at all can get through here. The current is terrific. Nothing can buck it."

"Then how do the river steamers operate?"

"Through El Torno—the Turn. I'll show it to you; also one of the steamers."

The boat crept to port, rounding the last of the left lying rampart of rock which, the watcher now learned, belonged not to the mainland but to a large island. Beyond that island lay another channel, wide, shallow, nearly dry, choked with rocks. Warily watching his course, the driver let his vessel travel slowly down amid the stony chaos, which, though seemingly impenetrable, still yielded passage. All at once he yanked the lever into reverse, swung broadside against a sloping stone, and stopped with a slight bump.

"Climb up there and take a squint downstream, away down," he directed, "and make it fast."

HAMMOND scrambled out and upward. From the top of the boulder he peered along the almost waterless waterway. Far down it, a misshapen but unmistakable hulk which once had been a ship protruded from the rubble, its plankless timbers showing stark against the low sky like fleshless ribs of some long dead giant; a vessel once staunch, now gutted and stripped by the grinding rock teeth of the river which had wrecked her. A melancholy spectacle to the eye of any man, she was doubly depressing to one planning to run his own vessels over the same course.

"See her?" called Thomas, impatiently.

"Yes."

After a hostile look at the malignant rocks eternally waiting to eviscerate other flood borne carriers of cargoes, Hammond descended. By delicate maneuvering, the boat worked free, turned in small space and moved carefully up the channel down which she had come.

"That was the *Alianza*," explained Thomas. "Regular government steamer, expert pilot, good crew, prominent passengers, valuable cargo, including half a million bolívares in cash. Current swung her a bit too far abeam. She crashed on a rock. Some of the passengers escaped on planks. Some drowned. Some fed the crocs. 'Twas quite a smash. Then there was the *Boyaca*, before her, ended the same way. Those two are all I know of; but they're not the only ones to wind up here. Navigating the Orinoco, my fellow explorer, isn't all plain sailing."

Hammond, sober faced, picked up his notebook and scribbled fast. The boat gradually increased speed. Waves mounted again; but, broken up by a number of islets, assailed the hull with less force. Riding with easy pitch and roll, the launch headed into a curving channel, free from rocks, leading between a wooded island and the near north shore.

Thomas ran a perfunctory glance along each bank, saw no life, dropped a hand from the wheel, settled down to enjoy a few minutes of relaxation. His lids drooped, and between them he snatched only occasional glimpses of the water beyond the bow. Soon he would be out again in the long rollers where the steady strain of vision must be renewed. Meanwhile he gave his eyes a rest. Beside him Hammond, with head bowed, continued jotting notes.

Suddenly both jumped. From the emptiness around them had broken a stentorian hail.

"*Alto!*"

The command smote across the water from the north shore. There, where no life had shown, now stood a group of men, suddenly visible against the verdure in which they had lurked. Beneath peaked straw sombreroes squinted hard faces, some brown, some yellow, peering along rifle barrels. One, whose dingy white clothing distinguished him from his drably dressed backers, beckoned imperiously.

"The devil!" muttered Thomas.

He shot a look toward the island. There, half crouching and alert, were several more armed men, covering the boat at short range.

"Caught cold!" he grumbled. "What a fool!"

Another hail, more menacing, barked from the mainland. A thumping report instantly followed. A splash sprang up just before the bow.

In response, the boat slowed at once; then turned obediently toward the northern party.

"*Quién es?*" yelled Thomas. "Who are you?"

As he spoke he darted a look at Hammond. The business scout sat as if petrified, staring at the gunmen. His rifle, within swift reach, was as far from his mind as if left in North America.

Derisive laughter was the only reply to the trader's question. Another bullet, wantonly fired, knocked a small geyser from the surface. Grinning desperadoes stood at ease, weapons sinking in loose holds, as the captured craft crept toward their greedy clutches.

NOW HAMMOND'S left hand stole toward his gun, as if moving without conscious purpose. Then it drew back, came to a stop on his left knee. He still gaped.

The older man's face turned stony. Sharply he ordered—

"Take the wheel!"

Seizing the irresolute hand, he pulled it to rest on the wooden ring. Mechanically Hammond obeyed the impelling force of words and muscle, moving into the driving seat as his prompter squeezed past him. While he made the transfer, Thomas hurled a volley of protest at his captors, who listened with triumphant chuckles. The boat continued to crawl inshore. Now it was only a few rods from its new masters.

"When I give you the word," rapidly muttered Thomas, now standing beside the screen, "yank open that throttle and get upriver!"

"But, we haven't a chance," objected the new driver.

"Shut up! Obey orders, you damned mollycoddle!"

The effect of that epithet was that of a physical kick. Red anger swept Hammond's face. His eyes blazed. His teeth snapped shut. Meanwhile Thomas, his voice half angry, half pleading, threw another expostulation shoreward, drawing in return hoots and jeers.

A few yards from the shore edge he snapped:

"Now! Go!"

The boat leaped, swerved, dashed headlong upstream. At the first sudden acceleration out broke a rapid succession of shots. Thomas, feet braced, jaw set, eyes drawn to slits, an unexpectedly revealed gun in each hand, hammered the astounded group of men with a drumfire of bullets.

The dirty white figure which had been leader among the grayish shapes collapsed. Several other forms staggered and dropped. The rest vanished like smoke, diving into cover. One wild shot flashed in retaliation, missing its mark. For the moment there was no other return fire.

Hand guns emptied, Thomas dropped them and seized Hammond's rifle. Up on the load of cans he sprang, to run nimbly to the stern. Already the boat, plunging ahead with full power, was leaving both sides of the ambushed gang behind. From his reeling foothold her master now

pumped several shots into the hitherto unassailed group on the island. Then he hurled the remainder of the magazine load into the spot where lay or crouched the mainland party. When the hammer clacked uselessly and no responsive kick bumped his shoulder he came dancing forward and dropped into the small clear space beside the driver.

From its notch he yanked his own gun. But he did not fire it. A moment of tense watching backward and he relaxed. Flashes winked from both shores behind the fleeing boat, splashes spurted from the surface, and astern sounded one sudden *thuck!* But no new holes appeared in the punctured netting. The watery eruptions fell farther to the rear. The big bored but short range rifles were outdistanced.

Under the cropped mustache flickered a hard smile. Then the blue eyes turned to the face of the tenderfoot explorer. They noted the burning flush of the cheeks, the grimness of the jaw, the fixity of the gaze on the white crested hordes ahead. A long moment passed.

Presently a thin hand rested briefly on a wide shoulder, which twitched itself abruptly away.

"My apologies," said Thomas. "You're a good soldier."

The gray eyes stabbed up at him, hotly resentful.

"Soldier, hell!" growled Hammond. "I'm a rotten soldier, and I know it. I went to sleep when I ought to have started shooting. But I'm no damned mollycoddle, either. And as soon as we're ashore again I'll knock your damned face off for calling me one!"

Thomas laughed, an explosive laugh compounded of enjoyment and relief from nervous tension. Once more he looked back toward the outwitted enemies of his progress. Then he sat down.

"Oh, all right," he conceded. "We'll fight if you like. But we're a couple of fools if we do. As for the mollycoddle part of it, I've just apologized for that. As for the soldier part of it, a good soldier obeys orders. You did."

THE BOAT smashed onward, hurling the split waves aside in swashing wrath. Hammond looked stonily ahead.

"You're green to these parts," added Thomas. "You're not used to shooting men. They don't reach that in Harvard classrooms—"

"I was on the college rifle team." Hammond snapped out the retort as if determined not to evade blame.

"So? Glad to hear it. But you shot at paper targets, of course. Shooting at men, shooting to kill, is a bit different. A fellow hesitates the first time. If my first man hadn't been a rotten shot I'd have been dead long before I ever saw you. He fired three times before I got started. So I know how it is. It doesn't come natural to a chap accustomed to being protected by city police. His mind isn't trained to it. By the way, we're using too much gas."

He reached over and swung the throttle down to half speed. The high bow sank, and the hull lurched along at an easier gait. Hammond, unmollified, said nothing.

"It was my fault that we got trapped," the river veteran declared. "We had to go through that channel—it's the only safe one at this stage of the water—but I should have kept my eyes open and been ready for fast action. It just didn't occur to me that we'd meet trouble there; I thought that gang was farther down the river. All of which proves that we all make blunders and that a chap must keep awake if he doesn't want to let somebody outguess him. We pulled out of it by good teamwork, but 'twas rather a narrow squeak. Now run her over to that little *playa* out yonder, and let's look at the damages. We got one bullet astern somewhere, and I don't want gasoline leaking into the bilge."

Quartering across the surges, the boat drove to the acre of bare sand obtruding at the left, curved about the western end and grounded on a gently slanting bottom, where, protected by the natural breakwater, she lay easily. Both her riders

emerged, Thomas to walk to the stern, Hammond to scowl back at the distant islet where discomfited bandits must now be venomously cursing, and where he had flunked in sudden test.

A quick survey showed Thomas that, aside from numerous holes in the wire net, the boat itself had suffered no damage. One can of gasoline had been struck at a corner by a heavy bullet, and most of its reeking contents had spurted out on the containers below. All other shots fired by the flurried gunmen had flown wild. Humming softly to himself, the owner returned inside, moved cans, sank a tin pump to the bilge, and made it suck out the spilled fuel and several gallons of water.

"All clear," he soon reported.

Going forward again, he reloaded the emptied guns, except Hammond's automatic pistol, which his own cartridges did not fit. Hammond, outside, watched moodily, his expression darkening still more. Those weapons of his, fired by another man when emergency struck, seemed to taunt him. Only yesterday he had wished for a chance to "do some blamming" with them in reckless fight; now the chance and the fight had come and gone, catching him unready, leaving him degraded in his own sight. Memory repeated and reiterated in sneering tone the name so recently flung at him:

"Mollycoddle! Damned mollycoddle!"

Thomas looked up from the guns, straight into his irate face. For a moment he stood very still. Then he set the rifles in their places, inserted revolver and pistol in their chair hung holsters, took off his glasses and stepped calmly out on the sand.

"I forgot," he said. "Well, we're both ashore."

Hands hanging loose at his sides, he waited. Hammond's fists tightened until the knuckles turned white. Then they relaxed.

"Don't be a fool!" he snapped. "Just because I'm one, you don't have to be!"

Thomas' mustache twitched. Hammond strode past him, flung himself into the boat, dropped hard into his chair. With his usual loosejointed motions, the other followed, donned his spectacles, took his seat and started the engine. The boat backed off the sand, swung, plowed away westward. Neither man spoke another word for hours.

CHAPTER X

SUNKEN HOPES

DAY BY DAY the sturdy boat plowed on up the sullen river, which, failing to overwhelm her by thrusting waves or break her on hidden stone or snag, let her pass.

Each day she rode more buoyantly, as her ponderous burden gradually burned itself away. Moreover, the hard wind of the first two days of cruising subsided on the third to a moderate breeze, and the turbulence of the stream correspondingly decreased. Boisterous in the morning, it sank to sleepy ripples in the afternoon. And when the westward run ended, beyond Caicara, and the course turned southward, the Orinoco became more and more placid; for there the sweeping trade wind was weakened by mountains standing tall in the east. Save for an occasional pouncing squall born in those mountains, there was little opposition for the steady swimmer to meet and master. And, save for the stops to eat, refill the tank, or sleep, the hours passed in peaceful monotone.

At Caicara, reached on the second night, was proved the wisdom of Thomas in using a launch and in loading it so full of fuel. A *piragua* moored at the bank was the one in which he had shipped his supplies a week previously. Although favored by strong wind, it had reached that port only two hours before him. From this point onward, with lighter and more fitful airs to propel it, it would travel all the more slowly. As for gasoline, not a quart of it was in the town shops. On learning this, the trader looked complacently at the ample supply in his cockpit and, before going to spend the evening

with the chief official of the place, appointed a strong framed crewman from the sailboat to sit on guard during his absence.

Hammond, once more equable of demeanor, accompanied Thomas into the dull little town, sized it up with some contempt and sat through a rather tedious hour or two in the official residence while a friendly but not altogether comprehensible conversation progressed. The *jefe,* short, stout, swarthy, spoke the abbreviated river *idioma* which still was but half intelligible to the newcomer and which he now made but little effort to grasp, since the talk evidently concerned only matters of local interest. It was noticeable, however, that this regional potentate seemed to feel honored by the visit of the trader and his assistant. As before, that assistant vaguely wondered why any one of standing should respect a river runner; but, since no answer was apparent, he let the question go unanswered. By the time he returned to the riverbank he was too sleepy to think further of the matter.

THAT night he slept for the first time in a hammock, which, like that of Thomas, was lashed to the long boom of the *piragua;* and, after learning the right posture to take within the yielding meshes, he enjoyed the most cool, comfortable rest since his departure from North America. No mosquito net was hung around either man, as insects were few in that breezy port. Nor was any other defense needed against more powerful creatures. Guns were left in the launch, where the crewman who had been the watcher in the early hours now snoozed on the cans. Thomas judged the fellow to be trustworthy. And so he proved to be.

Before departing in the morning, Thomas carefully patched every hole in the bullet torn wire net with bits of old sailcloth. Meanwhile Hammond examined the *piragua* with professional eye, studying her construction and sail rig, asking what sort of wood formed her planking and finally photographing her with his small camera. When he left her, he had complete information concerning the type of freighter—and, in the dry time, passenger boat as well—which the rivermen had found best adapted to use on the lower Orinoco. Too, he took a long look down the wide open hatch at the freight cramming the hold—boxes, bags, bundles, and gasoline tins. A faint smile curved the corners of his mouth. When he and his compatriot were back in the launch he bantered—

"For a man who's down here just for travel and study, Tom, you certainly take a huge load of supplies up into your back country."

"It does take a good deal to keep a student going," grinned Thomas.

With that he turned on the ignition and pressed the starter, and no more was said. Hammond never learned that, aside from the gasoline, very little of the cargo in that hold belonged to the man beside him; that most of the boxes and bundles were consigned to shopkeepers or rubber dealers at San Fernando de Atabapo, the only business center in the wide, wild Territorio de Amazonas. For some private reason, the wilderness traveler chose not to mention that fact.

They rode on, and for some time neither spoke again. By tacit consent, the narrow escape from capture above Hell Gate had not been commented upon since leaving the *playa;* Thomas was by no means proud of his laxity of vigilance there, and Hammond winced from the recollection of his failure to use his weapons. At length came an incident which appreciably relieved his inner rankling.

"There's a croc," idly remarked Thomas.

"Where?"

"Up ahead. Swimming across. See the two little bumps, about a yard apart? The first one's his nose, the second his eye. All the rest of him is under water. The original submarine. They're sly devils. And God help you if one ever gets a grip on you!"

Narrow eyed, Hammond watched the

two tiny spots which seemed only drifting stubs, yet which gradually moved athwart the current. Suddenly he seized his rifle.

"Give me a shot! Slow down and turn her a bit."

"Right-o."

The boat almost stopped, veering a bit to port. Hammond opened the screen door, leveled his rifle, aimed a second, fired. The twin bumps jerked, vanished; a long reptilian tail sprang aloft, struck about, thrashed the water into swift convulsion. Then the water quieted, and on it floated a long white belly.

Thomas solemnly lifted his cap and bowed.

"*Hombre*, you can shoot," he acknowledged. "Any man who can hit a croc's eye at that distance is a man I don't want shooting at me. I can hit a floating mark of that size about once in six tries."

The marksman chuckled joyously as he ejected the empty shell. If some inner monitor told him that he too might miss such a small target if he should try again, he dismissed the warning instantly. He had proved that he could use a gun when he was ready to use it. The satisfaction of demonstrating capability banished the recent feeling of contemptible incompetence.

As the boat brought him up to the body and he perceived the size of the murderous saurian, his contentment increased. And as the grewsome thing drifted away behind and the wide mysterious river whispered of possible adventures ahead—in which he might manifest even more laudable prowess—he unconsciously hummed a little tune.

Miles slid away before the driver spoke again. Then it was on a different subject.

"I've been thinking, Ham, it would be a good idea for us to talk *Venezolano* to each other; get you in practice, so you can handle the local language when you come back down river with native boatmen. It's not quite the same as your text book Spanish, you know."

"No, I've noticed that," was the good humored response. "Let's try it."

Thomas nodded with satisfaction, glad that he had saved the suggestion, which had been in his mind for days, until the other was ready to accept it. And he lost no time in starting his tutelage. Speaking slowly, he asked a simple question, to which his pupil haltingly replied. In the course of the next hour the college man acquired a vocabulary and a pronunciation which, though awkward, would be much more useful in his present environment than the half remembered words lackadaisically learned in bygone classroom exercises. And from that time onward the informal lessons were frequent and fruitful.

OTHER lessons, too, were absorbed in the succeeding days and nights—nights when stops were made, not at a settlement, but at spots uninhabited by human beings. For reasons unrevealed Thomas more than once drove past hamlets or isolated huts where were available good moorings and comfortable lodging, to camp at some place outwardly less desirable, where the boat rested uneasily and the men slept in hammocks hung between trees. If his object in doing thus was to give his companion a taste of life in uncivilized surroundings he said nothing of the fact. And Hammond, attentively observing what was done at these camps, learned new points of river travel.

For one thing, he learned the use of the screen on the boat, heretofore almost unnecessary, and of the closely woven *mosquitero* which, draped about the hammock, seemed insufferably hot. Now that the wind swept east to west section of the river was left behind, the banks and adjacent waters swarmed by day with tiny stinging flies—the *mosca-ito*—or true mosquito, of the tropics, which bit insatiably and left behind them intolerable itch; and at night flew the venomous *zancudo de noche*, shaped like the misnamed mosquito of the North, which flew without sound, bit without pain, but caused a horrible, infected sore. Both of these nerve torturing, disease planting insects were excluded by wire and cloth; and

when the inexperienced Northerner had negligently allowed himself to be attacked by both, he soon realized the value of protection from them.

He learned, too, that the mosquito bar excluded a more dreadful sucker of blood, the *murciélago*, or vampire bat; and that, despite its flimsiness, it served also to hold off the most murderous animals of the Southern continent—the *tigre* and the *león*—the jaguar and the panther, which prowled by night, savage, bold, yet wary of the tenuous barrier through which they could not see. The efficacy of flame, even though weak and harmless, against these two marauding giant cats also was demonstrated by Thomas' habit of hanging above the hammocks a lighted kerosene lantern, which, though snarls and footsteps sounded from the near darkness and eyes glowed green, held the fierce creatures to the shadows which they deemed safe. And, though his forefinger craved the feel of the rifle trigger and his mind visioned great hides to carry home, the tyro withheld his hand from his guns; for, from the talk of his experienced comrade, he had come to know that those ferocious beasts were best left unassailed unless the assailant were absolutely sure of the deadliness of his first shot; and in the dimness of the night he was not sure.

He acquired knowledge also of the dangers concealed below the deceptively vacant surface of the river, which, when his blood was superheated lured him to plunge in for refreshing swims. He learned to take his baths standing, knee deep, at the edge of the water, meanwhile watching for stealthy *caimán*, water boa, electric eel, sting-ray, or bloodthirsty *caribe* fish; to maintain constant vigilance toward shore, too, and up into overhanging branches, lest some malevolent *dalle* or *macaurel* snake dash from the undergrowth or drop from the leaves, or a sudden arrow flit from nowhere to strike him down.

The arrow, though improbable, was by no means impossible, particularly on the western margin; for at this time of year, Thomas mentioned, roving bands from various wild Indian tribes might come from mountains or plains to the uninhabited sections of the stream, there to fish and await the annual laying of turtle eggs; and most of these, with bitter memories of centuries of outrage and oppression by Spaniards, were by no means averse to assassinating any white man who might chance to come withing range of their brazilwood bows.

SMALLER details of the method of keeping alive upon and along this dangerous waterway were inculcated by the matter of fact words or deeds of Thomas and the quiet observation of Hammond. The latter had never been given to asking questions, but he used eyes and ears and retained what they told him. Pencil and notebook made no chronicle of these teachings, but the brain behind the gray eyes registered impressions more indelible. The lead and the paper served only to record brief notes and sketches of the changing topography.

During the daylight hours, as the boat steadily put the leagues behind her and the bank on either hand grew more varied, the younger man's gaze alternated between the near water and the far heights arising at unmeasured distances. On the river sometimes appeared another boat—a *piragua* with all sail set, or a wallowing *bongo* shaped from an enormous log and propelled by long sweeps, or a little *falca* or *curial* creeping up or down with a few paddlers dipping their blades in short strokes. So few were these other craft, however, that their infrequent appearances only accentuated the loneliness of the great flowing road stretching on into the unknown. When they faded from sight, the only other signs of human life were the little huts which, at longer and longer intervals, were visible against the endless shore growth. Behind them, the harsh hills and mountains stood grim, untamed, untrodden by any feet save those of wild animals and savage aborigines.

On those forbidding fastnesses, which receded eastward and southward through blue heat haze into the realm of the

unknowable, Hammond's gaze came to rest more often than on the featureless water; and at times his expression grew wistful. Over there were things as yet undiscovered, waiting for some bold explorer to come in and find them. If only a man had time to turn aside from this blank expanse and penetrate that inscrutable interior . . . He scowled at the Orinoco and silently vowed that some day he would take the time.

Then the Orinoco itself recaptured his thoughtful attention. A few leagues beyond the small adobe settlement of Urbana, where the motorboat made no stop, the sandy *playas* gave way to rocks. From the water's edge arose enormous black domes, stark precipices, weirdly shaped monstrosities of naked stone. In the river, stretching far out from either shore, chaotic masses of boulders and jagged upthrusts of bedrock formed *raudales*, rapids, where swift water obstructed by reefs and bars sluiced through tortuous channels, seething, roaring, spinning with grewsome hollow gurgles, opening in sucking whirlpools and closing again.

Through these treacherous traps the boat wormed its way by virtue of shrewd steering and unfailing motor, emerging unscathed into unobstructed water above. But the narrowness of the margin of safety caused Hammond to make sober notes in the book which was to form the basis of his later report. The Raudal Caribén he recorded as a bad risk for freight vessels; the Raudal de San Borje, farther up, much worse. Later, after some cogitation, he added:

> Safe, straight channels for all year use can be insured only by use of dynamite. Indestructible channel markers also are needed for guidance in flood time, when all rocks are covered.

Thomas, spying cornerwise at this note, smiled thinly, saying nothing.

The reason for that smile became apparent when, a couple of days later, the boat veered to the left of an obviously uninhabited island, ran close to shore, passed two deserted *piraguas* thickly draped with palm branches—which retarded, if they did not prevent, shrinkage of planks and gaping of seams under the torrid sun—and, threading a way inland among black boulders, came to rest against a sloping, thinly grassed bank. There Thomas shut off the power with an air of finality. From somewhere to the southward sounded a steady, subdued roar.

"You are now halfway up the Orinoco," he announced, "and at the head of navigation."

"Beg pardon?"

"The head of navigation. Hear the cataracts roaring? They're miles long. Nothing but birds can travel the river there. Now come here a minute. There's something yonder that will interest you."

HAMMOND followed him out and along a bush grown shore, at the base of which were boulders interspersed by patches of bare clay or sand, all of which would be under water when the floods again arose. At one of the sandy spots lay the stripped hull of a steel cargo boat, bow high, stern submerged, interior nearly filled with inwashed silt and sediment. Decks and fittings were gone, torn away by whatever wayfarers had chanced upon the craft since her abandonment.

Thomas picked up a loose stone and thumped it against the protruding bow. The metal gave forth a resonant clang, eloquent of solidity and strength.

"Good stuff in that hull," he remarked. "Honest steel. It's been here twenty years, men say—under water half the time—and it's still strong, in spite of rust. American steel, or English, I'm not sure which."

"How did she get here?"

"She was brought here, Ham, by a company which expected to do the same thing yours expects to do—and did it, for a while. They had boats like this on the upper Orinoco, the middle Orinoco, the lower Orinoco, and galvanized iron houses at the ports, and a shipping firm at Bolívar, and all the rest of it. 'Twas well organized, but killed by the one thing that kills all progress and all incentive in this country."

"What's that?"

"Revolutionary revolt. Which, in turn, is caused by the incompetence of politicians to run their own country and make it safe for business. The curse of Latin America."

Thomas turned away. Hammond stood alone amid the desolate solitude of the head of navigation, somberly eying the ruin of an enterprise which had begun and ended before he knew that there was a river named Orinoco.

CHAPTER XI

BY MOONLIGHT

MOONLIGHT lay cool and bright on the black stoned shores and the black surfaced water of the houseless port of Zamuro, head of navigation, where lay the sunken steel hulk and the floating launch.

Within the launch, now half empty of its fuel cargo, the two Northerners lolled in their chairs. A few rods away were the ashes of the little fire at which they had made a supper of quickly cooked rice, salt fish, crackers and tea. Now, as they puffed slowly at pipes, Thomas talked again of the bygone shipping venture, so similar to the project in the minds of the Hammond company, and its disastrous end.

The company had, he said, operated successfully for a time, aided in some degree by the Venezuelan government. In the heyday of high priced rubber it had brought from the rich upper river many tons of *caucho*, rare cabinet woods, and other valuable products of that fecund region. But repeated lootings by revolutionary or pseudo revolutionary gangs, wanton attacks by desperadoes, machinations of graft greedy local politicians, and failure of the faraway Caracas officials to enforce order along the great waterway—these had ruined the business. From the wreck, the company had salvaged only such moneys as it was able to collect, after international litigation, from the government, which had guaranteed adequate protection to the enterprise.

"Why didn't you tell me about this sooner?" probed Hammond.

"Because I didn't want to prejudice you—and because it wouldn't have stopped you. You're a stubborn cuss—" Thomas grinned—"and you'd have come on up here and seen things for yourself. Seeing is believing. Hearing may not be. So I saved the bad news until the right time and let you gather your own impressions. Now you know what you know. And by the time you've cruised a few more days you'll know a lot more."

He blew smoke thoughtfully southward and let his eyes stray to the spot where that forlorn freighter was now concealed by the long shadow of a leaning tree.

"Yes, you'll know a lot more," he repeated; then, abruptly digressing, "I'd like to see your company get in here, Ham, and open up the back country again. It would help to civilize this river and benefit its people—"

He paused.

"And help your own game along." quietly added the other.

"No, I'm afraid not. My game is—" the man from the wilderness checked again—"er—my game will be over before yours gets to going, old chap. I can't stand this climate more than a few months longer. I'm going back now to finish it up as well as I can. Then I have to go. Maybe somebody else will come down and take it up where I leave it, or maybe not."

Hammond stared, opened his lips to speak, but found himself intercepted. Thomas quickly went on:

"Anyway, I'd like to see an honest business get in here and liven things up. And the fact that one company failed doesn't necessarily mean that another will, if it's run wisely. Twenty years ago, you know, Cipriano Castro was dictator of Venezuela, and under him there was nothing but disorder, internal and external. There's disorder enough yet, but Gomez runs things much better than Castro did. So there's a chance. It's a

thin chance, unless the new company knows just what it's doing. But if the right men are in charge and keep awake all the time, the possibilities are unlimited.

"Our own West was developed when it was as wild as this, in the teeth of Indians worse than these down here and desperadoes fully as bad, and politicians fully as stupid and crooked, some of them. Of course the climate up there was much more healthful than this. You can't expect the same energetic expansion and settlement here. But you can expect a big improvement if things are managed right. Men are doing business in a small way along this river, and have for a good many years. Men can do business in a big way here, if they're big enough to handle it. They'll have to be big enough to possess vision, to understand the people and the conditions they have to deal with, to foresee all difficulties and be ready to overcome them when they arise—in short, to walk on their own legs and carry their load. It's not every man, or company, that can do that."

HAMMOND stared away into the moonlight. Presently he asked—

"What protection from robbers and raiders could be counted on now?"

"The same protection we had when we met that gang at the Puerta del Infierno. Ability to out-think, outshoot and outrun them. There's no other form of protection up here, and there's not likely to be."

A long silence followed. Somewhere far off a howling monkey hurled its ghastly noise at the moon. Somewhere nearby stealthy footsteps and a few sleepy squawks betrayed the presence of a prowling animal and a roosting but observant parrot. Away at the right rumbled the incessant rapids. Nowhere was any sound of human life.

Thomas yawned, put away his pipe, arose.

"Well, I'll leave you on guard tonight," he announced. "I'm going to Atures."

"You're what?" ejaculated the astounded passenger.

"Going to Atures. It's about a three mile walk, and now is the time to walk it, while the light is good and the air is cool. I'll be back early tomorrow with the carts and we'll get our stuff overland before noon. Otherwise we can't move until tomorrow night; the bullocks can't work in the heat of the day. Bolt the door and take a good snooze. So long."

He belted on his revolver, picked up his rifle, ran the chin strap of his helmet under his belt, rebuckled it and, still wearing his thin cap, stepped to the screen door.

"But I say," expostulated his partner, "you're not going alone—in the night—I'll go with you!"

Thomas laughed lightly.

"Don't worry, Ham. I've walked alone in many a place more dangerous than this. And I'm carrying two guns. I'd rather have you stick here, just in case some thief should come wandering in before I get back. You'll do me no good by going, and you might do considerable good by staying. Now I'll toddle along. See you later."

"Well, all right. But—"

"*Buen' noche'!*"

"Good night."

The trader swung briskly out and away, rifle swaying loosely in the right fist, helmet bulging grotesquely at the left hip. Up the sloping shore he plodded, and, without a backward look, he was gone beyond the crest. For the first time since his arrival in Venezuela, Hammond was absolutely alone; alone in utter loneliness, with only the voices of wild creatures to speak to him during the long hours before dawn.

FOR SOME time Hammond sat there, frowning at the spot where his guide and friend had faded from sight. Then he stood up, buckled on his heavy pistol and stepped out. At the top of the bank he stood peering uselessly southward, seeing only black bushes and rocks. By this time Thomas must be half a mile away, trudging fearlessly on

toward the settlement where lived the boss of the crude overland transport service.

After a few minutes of looking and listening the night guard walked over to the somber steel hull, sat down on its rusty prow and idled awhile in meditation. Subconsciously he kept track of all sounds which came to him, but none moved him to turn his head. At length he stood up again, stretched and sauntered back to the launch. There he looked again toward the region where his companion might still be walking. His thoughts, just now engaged with consideration of his father's business, fastened again on the self-reliant man whom he had so luckily chanced to meet.

"Nervy devil," he ruminated aloud. "For that matter, he'd never be here unless he had cast iron courage. He's been in many a tight place, I'll gamble, and gotten out of it by absolute fearlessness. But what on earth is his game down here? He can't be just a trader; he's going out soon, and he doesn't seem to care much whether any one else takes up his business when he's gone—"

He stopped short. Suddenly he slapped a thigh and laughed.

"Of course! You've been blind as a bat, Ferd! He's not dealing in rubber and roots and such stuff as that. He's after gold! This is gold country, back in the mountains. And he's been making the Indians dig it, and paying them with trade stuff, and keeping his mouth shut. And now he's going to run it all out at once in this long boat and be rich for life. That's it!"

Chuckling, he stooped through the little door, shut it firmly and ran his gaze along the capacious cockpit. Gold was heavy, he had heard. But, beyond doubt, a boat which could carry upstream such ponderous freightage of gasoline could bring down at one load a princely fortune in yellow metal.

"Fox!" he muttered.

Then, forming a rough and ready bed in a cleared space on the floor, he once more looked and listened, lay down, loosened his pistol and drowsed away to sleep.

TIME slid away unnoticed. The clear sky became blotted here and there by dark clouds, shapeless, slow, which occasionally smeared out the moon and spread gloom over the port of Zamuro. At length, for no tangible reason, the man asleep on the boards found himself wide awake, eyes seeking something, ears intent for some sound.

Save for the monotonous mumble of the rapids, now so familiar to his ears as to go unnoticed, there was no noise. Within and without the screen there was no menacing form. Light was very dim, but not entirely extinguished; a trailing cloud was over the moon, but from wide spaces of clear sky beyond it fell the almost imperceptible radiance of many stars, giving sight to the dilated pupils which swept from side to side. After a rapid survey of all within his limited radius, the guardian of the boat quietly sat up. Then he started, fist closing on his pistol butt.

A few yards away had barked a loud, harsh cough.

He knew that savage sound; knew it came from no human throat; knew it for the inarticulate curse of a hungry but wary jaguar, wishful to attack, angered by its own irresolution. He had heard it before, downriver, outside the weak range of the burning lantern. Now no lantern was alight. The wire net formed a better protection, perhaps; but it was by no means strong. The moon would reappear in a minute, and then the marauder might take to cover. But then again, he might not.

Through Hammond surged sudden fierce hope that he would not.

He stood up, stealthily grasped his rifle. The recent teachings of Thomas concerning the peril of attacking a *tigre* were gone as if never spoken. Eagerly he searched the vagueness outside. Black shapes, dimly perceived, formed an indeterminate huddle of rocks and bush. Nothing moved. No repetition of the beast's voice came. The big brute was motionless, watching him. He could feel its ferocious gaze, yet could not see it. With bated breath he peered and waited.

The light suddenly strengthened. The moon was at the thin edge of the cloud. On the shore a long shadow moved, vanished before the swiftly raised gun could center on it. Petrified, Hammond kept his attention fixed on the spot where it had been and still might be. Then came full moonlight, disclosing all.

"The devil!" growled Hammond.

His rifle was menacing the harmless base of a short, thick tree.

But, in answer to his mutter, eyes suddenly glowed in the dense shade under that tree; big green eyes flaming with malevolence.

"Ha!" breathed the tense man.

His muzzle jerked to new aim. Instantly it belched fire.

The eyes vanished. A savage screeching roar burst from the shadow. Unseen claws rasped on rock. In the launch sounded the short clatter of a breechblock and the tinkle of a falling shell. Then—

With paralyzing suddenness a leaping demon catapulted from the shadow; a demon with gleaming teeth, glaring eyes, hooked claws, hurling itself on the boat. Headlong it struck the screen. The screen tore loose with scratchy thump. The slavering head and gaping jaws shot through, reaching for the man. That man, knocked backward by a terrific blow, fell asprawl on the cans behind.

An instant of scrambling, and he was crouching astern on the cargo, pistol in hand, face hard set, eyes slitted, awaiting the oncoming beast. But the beast did not come. It had vanished again, all but its tail. The end of that tail lay on the crushed in section of the screen. It did not move.

Slowly he worked forward, every nerve and muscle drawn tight, every faculty concentrated on that motionless tail. The slightest quiver, and he would shoot. But no quiver came. Inch by inch he advanced, and inch by inch he lifted to greater height, until the awning rubbed the back of his head. Then he saw the night devil again, huddled on the floor boards below the wheel, where he had just slept. It was dead.

NOT UNTIL he watched it for minutes longer, however, did he come within reach of it. Then he stepped down and kicked it to reassure himself of its lifelessness. Satisfied, he holstered his pistol and, for the first time, became aware that he was holding it. What had become of his rifle?

The light of the electric torch gave the answer. The barrel of the rifle was locked in the beast's jaws, and the muzzle far down its gullet. He wrenched it forth with difficulty, avoiding pressure on the trigger. Then, as the red-stained steel emerged, stunned memory awoke. He himself, acting without thought and almost without consciousness of his movement, had thrust the gun into that horrible mouth and shot again as he fell. It was the combined impact of plunging destroyer and of rifle recoil that had knocked him down.

His first bullet, he now learned, had only ripped along the spotted side, throwing the astounded creature off balance and arousing it to reckless fury at the same instant. He had fired too hastily, or the *tigre* had moved just as he pressed trigger. Scowlingly he contemplated the long slash which ruined the symmetry of the hide, meanwhile rubbing his right shoulder, which now was growing lame from the double blow. But then he eyed the outer moonlight, felt in a pocket for his clasp knife, stooped, heaved up the carcass, threw it out on shore and climbed out in turn

For the next hour he toiled, inexpertly but doggedly, at the task of removing the skin. Now and then he lifted his head to look around, then returned to his labor. Various sounds of the night came to him, and some were near and mysterious; but he gave them no particular attention. The hour was too late for men to be abroad, and he felt quite competent to repel any other prowlers. When at last the big dappled hide was freed from the body, he returned waterward and washed hands and knife. Thereafter he hung the trophy across the awning, with head and shoulders hanging down over the broken

section of wire. Surveying it, he laughed.

"Well, Señor Tigre," he mockingly asked, "how does it feel to be only a mosquito screen?"

He reentered his sleeping quarters, stretched himself without bed or covering on the cans and, after a period of pleasurable reminiscence, drifted away again into slumber.

And this was the man who, a fortnight ago, had been wary of walking unarmed along the policed, lighted streets of Bolívar.

CHAPTER XII

BETWEEN THE RAPIDS

"WELL, you big idiot!" Thomas, helmeted and hot, squinted through morning sunlight at the dangling jaguar hide, glanced aside at the knot of full fed black vultures still sluggishly working at the bony carcass, and wrinkled his brows at Hammond, who stood smiling through a head net sprinkled with baffled mosquitoes.

"He attacked the ship, Cap'n," the night guard replied, with mock humility, "so I seen my duty and I done it."

The humorous reply drew no grin from the river runner. Instead, his scowl deepened.

"Attacked the ship?" he scoffed. "Tell me another!"

"Oh, well, come and look at the evidence."

He led the way down the slope to the boat, lifted the drooping skin, revealed the torn wiring and pointed to deep claw scratches on the adjacent woodwork.

"Maybe you wouldn't call that an attack," he plagued, "but to my simple mind it looked like one."

"Humph!" Thomas pulled down the trophy and inspected it, looking longest at the ragged bullet rip along the side. "Humph! I see. He scratched himself open and then blamed it on you. You gave him no provocation whatever."

"Exactly. And, by the way, there's no particular trick to killing a *tigre*. All you have to do is to run your gun down his throat and then shoot. You can't miss."

"Eh?"

The veteran eyed him probingly; then reached inside, drew out Hammond's rifle and peered at bright scratches on its blue barrel. Thereafter he stared down for a minute at the cockpit flooring, which, negligently washed, still bore testimony as to what had lain there. As his eyes again met those of the grinning youngster his own teeth showed briefly.

"You'll do," was his dry comment. "Well, let's get ready to move. The wheels will be here in a minute. Take this." He handed over the rifle. "You'll carry that yourself. The peons will pack the rest in the carts."

"Where's your own gun?" Hammond glanced at his partner's empty hands.

"Left it back yonder at Atures. Safe enough. I know the fellow who's keeping it. And there are no bad eggs around here at present."

A rumble of heavy wheels, a dry squeak of axles, and a brief, cursing command to toiling animals heralded the arrival of the carts of which he had spoken. The pair walked up the shore again, to find, in clear ground beyond, three yoke of half tame bullocks, a couple of two wheeled dump carts, a long low chassis without a body, and a trio of ragged, barefoot, yellow skinned drovers. The oxen and the men alike had detected the presence of the feasting vultures and the stripped cat corpse; and the animals were restive, the peons curious.

"One *tigre* the less to kill your cattle," called Thomas, in the vernacular. "My partner shot it in the night. Now throw it into the water and get to work!"

The laborers pressed forward. The vultures resentfully hopped away, croaking harsh invective. After a moment of muttered exclamations as they viewed the fleshless night prowler and a stare of deep respect at its tall slayer, the natives moved it to the water and cast it in. The gross birds slowly took flight to neighboring trees. The uneasy bullocks quieted. Then the drovers went to work.

INTO the carts they packed the freightage of the boat. Thereafter, under the active direction of Thomas, they worked the bodiless truck under the launch, roped watercraft and landcraft together, rigged block and tackle to a stout tree, and set the oxen to hauling. Bumping, careening, the motorboat crawled up the bank amid bawled expletives and surmounted the crest. Soon thereafter it was rolling slowly southward, the dumpcarts sedately following. Ahead walked the North Americans, Thomas fanning away hordes of day mosquitoes with a flapping handkerchief, Hammond secure behind his helmet net. The wilderness traveler, despite his care to protect himself from insects while in boat or camp, would not wear while walking any mesh to repel them. His only explanation of this inconsistency was that he hated the things.

"I've been wondering how you'd get your boat past the rapids," Hammond presently vouchsafed. "I didn't know these chaps had a way of moving boats."

"They haven't. That is, any boat but canoes. Those can be dragged across on the carts. A boat with an engine as heavy as mine needs a special truck. And that truck's mine; made in the States and imported expressly for me. We'll take it apart at the other end, load it aboard, carry it up to Maipures, the next portage, and use it again there. Then I'll leave it there until I come down again."

"Oh. Don't you need it above there?"

"No chance to use it. There are no roads and no cattle up where I work. I go as far as I can by motorboat, then lay her up and go on in dugouts."

"You must go far inland."

"I do. I go where nobody else dares to go."

Hammond looked sidewise at his guide. He had never known Thomas to boast. These words sounded a bit braggart. But the matter of fact tone, the unselfconsciousness of the speaker's forward look, proved him to be telling simple truth.

"And where's that?"

"I'll show you if you keep on traveling with me," was the enigmatic promise. "Right now you'd better size up the road that was used by the first men in here and will have to be used by your company. There's no other route."

No more was said for miles. Hammond, thus reminded of his mission, watched the road. It wound along, following the easiest grades, through an open, gently rolling country. Dwarfed trees studded the land, thickening to what seemed a forest at the left. Black rocks jutted here and there. Gray ant hills, hard as cement, stood near and far, some of them tall as a man, all grotesque of form. At occasional water holes grew clumps of *moriche* palm, the fronds whispering in vagrant breezes. Now and then a tremendous black block of stone showed a mile or two away, then was obliterated by near trees. At intervals were met low, rectangular mounds, sharp sided, so regular as to suggest ancient, unmarked graves as, perhaps, they were.

Once the slow procession passed a large white skeleton, stripped of every vestige of meat by vultures, yet patently new; the bones of a bullock which had recently hauled loads along the twisty way, then dropped dead beneath the killing sun. At this Hammond looked with frowning gaze, but without a word.

The road itself, nothing but a wheel track, was firm, smooth, and sun-baked into stony hardness. Along it the carts and the boat rolled with little straining by the draught animals, and the men marched without effort. At length woods closed around them and, a few rods farther on, a short, steep declivity ended at water; a little blackwater river, a scant pistolshot wide, but unbridged. There floated a couple of dugout canoes. Beyond the stream stood a long mud house thatched with palm, two or three open palm sided sheds and a high corral.

WHILE Hammond watched and Thomas barked at the drovers, the boat was run into the water, the freightage of the carts unloaded into the canoes and the cattle unyoked. Then

the bullocks were swum across the stream, the canoes paddled to the other side, and the boat—with its señores aboard—hauled over by a long rope. Still on its wheels, the launch was drawn up the opposite bank. Other carts were packed. Thomas entered the house, stayed a few minutes, came out with his rifle.

"If I were you," he prompted, "I'd leave that catskin here. You have to come back to this place. And it will only turn hard and brittle upriver. Why carry it?"

Hammond considered, then assented. His partner yanked the trophy off a cart, reentered the dwelling, emerged and snapped at the drovers. The bovine parade resumed its way overland.

"Do you see a need for anything new hereabouts?" the trader then inquired.

"A bridge over that creek. And some light motor trucks instead of the cattle."

"Correct. All the products of Amazonas have to travel this road. Yet there's no bridge to take them across that *caño*. Why? Because every time one is built it's destroyed by some gang of brainless bandits or rebels who think they're damaging government property; and there's nobody to stop them. As for the cattle, they fall dead from sunstroke, or else they're killed for beef by those same bandits, and then there's no more haulage until new bullocks are brought in."

"Why doesn't the government keep a garrison here to protect business and put on a truck or two to handle it?"

"I'll bite. Why doesn't it?"

They trudged on, silent. Neither of them could foresee—nor could any one else, in that year, 1922—that within half a decade the government, stung from long lethargy by revolutionary disorders in Amazonas, would construct here a straight troop road, erect a steel bridge across the blackwater stream and enforce its authority as never before. Even if they could have glimpsed that possibility, they would inevitably have dismissed the vision as incredible; for nowhere in the cheerless environs was visible any sign of anything but decadence.

Soon they passed a straggling collection of clay houses, numbering perhaps a dozen, most of which were obviously untenanted. Several were roofless; two were in tumbledown ruins; others gaped with blank windows and doorways at the travelers. From the few which were kept in repair, stolid mestizo men or slatternly yellow women watched the passing vehicles. Hammond, sweeping the squalid settlement with one contemptuous glance, asked—

"Has this bunch of fleahouses a name?"

"Oh, yes. This is the bustling metropolis of Atures."

"Humph! And that trick map of mine makes it look as big as Caicara!"

"I know it. And it shows Maipures, above here, as large as Bolívar, while you'll find it less than half the size of Atures. What the mapmakers up home don't know would fill a library."

So morose was the tone of the hitherto good tempered pilot that his companion studied him sidewise, wondering whether he felt ill. But, with new found tact, he refrained from asking.

Another mile or two crept behind. Then trees closed in again on the road. The track continued, however, by winding turns, for perhaps another hundred yards, to end in a clearing. At the outer end of the open space flowed the Orinoco, thickly studded with waterworn rocks.

THE BOAT was returned to the water and reloaded. The vehicle which had transported it was taken to pieces and stowed inside. Then, watched with rapt attention by the peons, the launch glided out and carefully nosed its way upstream. And for three hours thereafter it dodged more rocks than Hammond had previously seen.

"This," declared Thomas, frowning fixedly ahead, "is about the toughest section of this tough old river, in more ways than one. The rapids at Atures, behind us, and those at Maipures, ahead of us, are the worst in the whole run; and these thirty odd miles in between are

densely populated by boat busting stones, as you observe. And the bugs, as you will also observe the second you step ashore, are thicker and thirstier than anywhere above or below this stretch.

"And any Indians who happen to spy you from the west shore will murder you with half a chance. They'll follow for miles, keeping concealed behind the bush, to get a shot at you if you go ashore. They're a Cuiba-Guahibo mixture, and stealthy and deadly as snakes. The Guahibos are a decent lot, as a rule, but not where they've mixed with the Cuibas. And any other man you may find along here, unless he's traveling on the water, as we are, is likely to be as bad as those Indians, or worse; a renegade, a habitual murderer, a reptile so absolutely bad that not even the hard *hombres* of Amazonas will allow him within gunshot. Otherwise he wouldn't be here. Nobody lives in this hellhole between the rapids unless he has to. The captain and crew of the Hammond boat that operates this stretch will have to be well armed and hard boiled."

Hammond eyed the dense growth along the shores, to all appearance utterly empty of human creatures, yet suggestive of masked menace. Was some silent band of sinister brown bloodhounds even now running along in the open land behind that thick fringe of green, seeking its chance to shoot six foot arrows into the white men who might stop to eat or rest? The question presently answered itself, as the boat passed the mouth of a small river debouching from the mysterious Colombian llanos; a river narrow and crooked, yet wide enough and deep enough to stop any men without canoes from crossing. No balked forms showed themselves, no baffled yells sounded as the little vessel pushed on. No man was there.

"Everything has been quiet along here for some time," added Thomas, as if answering his thought, "but you never can tell."

Hammond turned his attention once more to the dangerous waterway.

A little after noon, the river swung to the left. Past a huge black dome of rock the boat slid at quarter speed, to find itself confronted by an impassable barrier. Midstream, a narrow island parted two long chutes of writhing white water, which lashed and spouted and roared over immovable jags and juts of bedrock. In all the river's width was no dark water track for a boat.

"How would you get up that, explorer?" asked Thomas.

"I wouldn't."

"Correct. Nobody ever has, and nobody ever will. That's Camejo, the tip of the tail of the Maipures raudal—and mild and gentle compared to what lies above. So we won't try it."

FOR a minute longer he held the boat steady, letting the scene register indelibly on the mind of the scout for Hammond and company. Then he turned back. A quarter mile downstream, crossing to the west shore, the faithful craft nosed into a small, clear, olive green river thickly flanked by bush; slid up beside a sandy shore and, in the shade of a wide spreading tree, stopped.

"The river Tuparo," enlightened Thomas, "and the beginning of the second overland haul. Also, the worst mosquito hole on the entire river. And, by golly, we didn't fix the screen! Stick that shirt over the hole, quick!"

An inrush of bloodthirsty black specks emphasized the need for haste. Swiftly the voyagers blocked further ingress of the insatiable insects. But, by the time the opening had been made bug proof, at least a hundred of the pests were inside and stinging faces, necks and hands like fiery needles.

"I'm getting old, I guess," grumbled the veteran. "Out on the water we didn't need the screen much, but I certainly meant to repair it before we hit this place. Then I forgot it."

"We'll live through it."

"Oh, yes. I'm hardened to bugs. And you have your head net. Well, let's eat. Then I'll walk."

"To where?" Hammond scanned the shores, seeing no sign of a house.

"Maipures, about two miles overland, at the other end of the portage. The carts will come at sundown, and we'll move by moonlight."

They opened a can or two and ate, Hammond with good appetite, Thomas not so well. The place was breezeless and, though the boat lay in shade, the heat was that of an oven. When the driver removed his glasses his eyes looked dull and shrunken. His mouth, too, seemed drawn. When he laid aside his plate with its frugal contents only half eaten Hammond studied him in concern.

"Feeling all right, Tom?" he asked.

"Yes!" The other straightened aggressively. "My eyes are a bit tired. That's all."

"Sure that's all?"

"Sure!"

Hammond filled and lighted his pipe, looked carelessly along the shadowy little river, flashed a sudden glance at his partner and saw on the leathery face a frown of pain.

"Tom, you're a cheerful liar," he calmly asserted. "You've got a beastly headache."

"Well—er—just a touch," reluctantly admitted the sufferer. "But I'll walk it off."

"No, you won't." Hammond smiled at him. "You can't walk off a headache under this sun, and you know it. So, for once, you're going to let your assistant do some assisting. You stick here and keep quiet, and I'll go over to Maipures. The road is plain, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. But, man, you don't know what it means to walk that stretch at this time of day! The sun beating down on this flat is something horrible—far worse than at Atures."

"So much the more reason for you to keep out of it."

"But I'm hardened to it, and you're not."

"No more argument, Tom. You can't baby me any longer. After shoving a gun down a tiger's gullet and making him like it, I think I'm man enough to walk a couple of miles alone in broad daylight. If I get tired or scared, I can come back."

Thomas grinned despite himself. Then his eyelids twitched from another stab of headache. His assistant, with no more words, began buckling on his pistol.

"Well, all right," he surrendered. "I forgot you were an explorer, Ham. Now you can explore the bull road if you like. Tell Marcelo, the boss at Maipures, that I'm here and that I want the oxen as soon as it's safe for them to come over. Stay there and wait. I'll see you tonight."

"Right-o."

The messenger adjusted his head net, picked up his rifle, threw open the door and scrambled out, shutting it quickly after him.

"But you stay in and behave yourself," he added, "or I'll chastise you severely."

"Humph! Try it once!"

THEY grinned at each other. Then Hammond moved up the slight slope and passed out of sight behind the shore growth, walking with confident stride, helmet tilted in soldierly fashion over the right eye, rifle lying easily over a wide shoulder. The man who stayed behind watched him with a touch of paternal pride and a half smile of reminiscence.

"If Harvard could see you now, Ham!" he mused. "You don't look nor act much like that red cravatted young Count of No Account whose feet froze to the gangplank at Bolívar when a gun went off. Whiskers on your jaw, blood spots on your pants, a gun on your belt and another on your shoulder, and a swagger like a bucko buccaneer—no, you're not the same, lad, and maybe you'll never be the same again. It's marvelous, the way this hot old river can peel the veneer off anything and show up what's underneath. Ouch! Damn this head!"

He slumped forward, both hands pressed hard against his throbbing temples.

Out on the open cart track, his young partner muttered as he marched away:

"Game old scout! He's had that headache all the morning, but he never peeped. And he would have walked this stretch without saying a word about it. A good siesta will— Hum! I wonder if it's safe to nap alone here."

He paused, peered back, remembering his comrade's words concerning the dangers of this section. Only the waterside bush met his gaze. All was still, save for the rumble of the distant *raudal*. For a moment he stood, hesitant. Then, smitten by realization of the absurdity of worrying over the safety of a well armed, quick shooting veteran of unknown wildernesses, he started on at quicker gait. Thereafter he looked back no more.

CHAPTER XIII

DEATH STRIKES

A MILE from the Tuparo port whence he had so confidently started, Hammond was no longer walking with a swagger. In truth, his dogged gait more nearly approximated a stagger. As Thomas had foretold, the sun was horrible.

He had found that sun hot in Ciudad Bolívar, where an invigorating breeze blew. He had found it hotter at the Atures portage, where only faint breaths of air stirred. But now that it was pouring in full intensity on the gravelly soil of Maipures, it surpassed anything he had ever known or imagined. Despite his helmet, despite his days of inurement on the open river, it struck him like impalpable but incessant blows of a bludgeon beating his brain. His vision blurred. His head felt dazed. His lungs labored for breath. His feet dragged. And at length, though no obstacle lay before them, they stubbed and stumbled.

Something within him, more and more insistent, urged him to stop and take shelter. And, though his obstinacy drove him onward, his eyes began to swing from side to side, seeking shade. The search was vain. Scattered, starveling trees, scantily limbed and leaved, stood here and there, but their shadows were so thin as to be merely a phantasmal diminution of the glare. Rocks arose, but all were smooth and sloping, allowing the light rays to slide down their slant sides without a break. On this burning plain there seemed to be no refuge for any sun sickened creature larger than a mouse. So the man who had so blithely fared forth into it marched on, driving his legs by force of necessity and by stubborn will.

"Slow down! Stop! Squat and rest!" commanded the age old monitor within, its voice rising from a whisper to a vehement yell. "You must! Cattle fall dead under this sun, and you're no stronger than an ox! Stop!"

"I won't!" snapped Ferdinand Hammond. "It's worse to stop than to keep going. And there's no place to stop. Shut up!"

Rallying his forces, he lengthened his stride again. But the thin blur before his eyes thickened. And his stomach, attempting to digest the recent meal, began to revolt. Reserve strength ebbed toward nausea.

Then the meandering road swung toward a clump of trees sturdier and taller than the puny growths hitherto met. It did not enter them. But Hammond did. As the track veered away again, he kept straight on, stubbornness surrendering to sense. Over gravelly hummocks he stumbled, and into deep shade. There his knees gave way, and he sank with back against a tree trunk, head drooping far forward.

For some time he squatted there while the stunned feeling gradually passed off. The windless air was stifling, but the stupefying rays of the sun—much more deadly than mere heat—were cut off by the thick foliage; and, shielded from them, he revived. As strength imperceptibly flowed back, he angrily reproached himself for halting.

"Weakling" and "quitter" were two of the mildest epithets he called himself.

And, driven by self-scorn, he emerged from his shelter sooner than was wise.

IT TAKES time and actual experience to make the tenacious Anglo-Saxon realize the deadliness of torrid sun. The aboriginal Indian of tropic climes, actuated almost entirely by instinct rather than by reason, understands it. The native born mestizo or white knows it from childhood by the precept and example of his elders. But to the newly arrived adult from the temperate zone a temperature of a hundred and ten—fifteen—twenty degrees is merely heat, which, in midsummer, he may have felt for a short period at home. He endured it then, believes himself fully able to endure it now, especially if he wears a solar topi.

Slowly comes the comprehension that it is not heat alone, but heat and light intensity combined, which he meets in the equatorial regions, and that his body, no matter how strong, is not constructed to stand the full force of it; that the process of metabolism, or reconstruction, or acclimatization, will take months of time, and that until that biological process is over he can not face with impunity the same exposure as the natives of the hot lands. It is not a matter of will or of strength, physical or mental. It is an immutable law; and he who defies it incurs grave risk of sudden death. Until this inescapable fact is fully comprehended, however, the headstrong Northerner is likely to subject himself to suicidal hazards.

So with Hammond. The lesson he might have learned from his insomnia at Bolívar had not been assimilated. Nor was this much sterner demonstration of sun power any more efficacious. Where another quarter hour of rest within his sanctuary would have restored full vigor, he refused himself that additional time of recuperation. Out into the blaze he strode with jaw set and brow ascowl, and along the road he drove himself without another halt until he reached Maipures.

A HOMELY clay house, with a crude low fence before it and several palm huts behind, was the first he met, and the only one; for there he stopped. Near it stood three or four carts, the presence of which indicated that this was the habitation of Marcelo. Nobody was in sight. A stout plank door in the middle of the front wall was shut. Up to it he trudged, head hanging, eyes glazed, mind wondering why the place seemed afloat in a fog. He lifted a leaden hand, knocked twice—and found himself leaning heavily against the vertical barrier. Now that his legs had ceased their automatic motion they felt unable to support him. He was slipping down.

He braced himself, stood erect. His rifle butt thumped the door. His voice, harsh as the croak of a buzzard, called:

"Hey! Marcelo!"

Several dragging seconds passed. Then a bar slid, and the door crept back a few inches. Black eyes peered suspiciously from a broad, bronzed, hard jawed face within. Hammond swayed toward it, caught himself, stood rigid.

"*Quién es?*" bluntly demanded the cart boss, sharply watching the rifle in the stranger's lax hand. "*Qué quiere?*"

"The Señor Tomás waits for carts at the Tuparo," rasped Hammond's dry voice, sounding queerly distant to his own ears. "I am thirsty. Water!"

The sharp black gaze probed an instant longer. Then the door swung wide.

"Come in. Sit," invited Marcelo, gesturing to a crude bench beside a battered table.

Hammond lurched in and dropped on the bench. There he sagged, staring dully at his host, who regarded him now with observant attention, no longer cautious. The door slowly closed by its own ill hung weight. The room seemed very dim, but very cool. Hammond felt that he ought to doff his heavy helmet and the obscuring head net, but the effort seemed too great. The rifle slipped from his fingers, thwacked on the hard earth

floor. He let it lie. Something warned him that if he should stoop he would pitch on his face.

"Very hot!" abruptly said Marcelo. "Water, yes. A moment."

He vanished. Hammond sat in the same slumped attitude, mouth open, breath coming in shallow gasps. Presently he fumbled at his net, managed to loosen its draw cord, poked off his headgear and let it fall beside the gun. Thereafter he rubbed his hands over his sweat soaked hair, trying to banish the haze within his skull; trying, too, to overcome the exhaustion which weighed him down like chains.

"Drink," came the laconic bidding of Marcelo.

Barefoot, noiseless, he had returned unperceived. In one hand he bore a cracked earthenware pitcher, in the other a cheap cup, nearly full. The Northerner sat up, seized the cup, downed its colorless contents in rapid swallows. Then he coughed, gasped, stared at the donor. The water was not water, but clear cane rum—*caballo blanco*, fiery and powerful.

"Now comes the water," grinned Marcelo, slopping liquid from the pitcher into the cup.

Hammond, once tricked, tasted this suspiciously before gulping it down. This time the water was real.

"Soon you will feel better," promised the Venezuelan. "Now rest. There is much time. We shall talk later, after a little siesta."

He yawned as he spoke, displaying snaggy yellow teeth. Then, setting the pitcher on the table, he walked away without further words. Through a small doorway at the end of the room he passed, shutting it behind him.

In the dimness the sun defier sat alone, still gulping down the aftertaste of the alcohol. Marcelo, having done what he considered his duty, had gone to resume his interrupted siesta and, with untutored tact and hospitality, to give complete relaxation to a guest who needed it badly.

THE GUEST drank more water. The bothersome haze thinned out.

A tingle passed through all his veins, succeeded by a comfortable glow of restfulness. He drew a long, deep breath, lifted his head, looked all about. The room was virtually bare and empty of all other life. At one end hung an old hammock. Near the outer door a couple of paddles leaned against the wall, and on a peg hung a palm strip sombrero. Nothing else, save bench and table, was there. He eyed the hammock, shook his head slightly, bent and picked up his rifle; laid it on the table, put his arms over it, and let his head sink on the arms. He would doze a few minutes. There was nothing else to do.

Pleasant lassitude crept stealthily over him. Vague, rosy, rum born dreams stole from nowhere, melted softly into one another, entertained his mind with delightful fantasies. After awhile he lifted his head again, feeling a little sleepy, but magically refreshed; yawned, stretched, glanced benignly around and drew his tiny watch from its pocket. He had been dreaming about ten minutes, he thought. To his shocked amazement, the dial declared he had been oblivious of his surroundings for about two hours.

Incredulous, he opened the door. The slant of the shadows outside corroborated the timepiece. So did Marcelo, who, lounging in a shady spot near one of the carts and watching a peon who quietly worked at some small repair, heard the door creak and glanced keenly at the surprised face which protruded.

"The señor is awake," he told the worker. "Now you may make all the noise you like. Ho, señor, why did you not rest in the hammock?"

"How do you know I did not?" countered the chagrined foreigner.

"Ho! I looked at you, an hour ago. Now, señor, how many carts does *el doctor* need?"

"Doctor?" blankly echoed Hammond.

"*Sí*. How many?"

"Er—two. And cattle for the boat."

"Of course. Two carts, then. *Bien*."

Marcelo turned his head again toward the peon, saying nothing more. Evidently he was not prodigal of words, nor inquisitive concerning the affairs of the stranger who came as the messenger of "the doctor." That stranger, contemplating the heat cracked ground a moment, puzzled as to the reason for dignifying the trader, gold smuggler, or whatever he might be, by that title. Then he nodded. No doubt Thomas knew a little about the uses of common medicines and had treated a few simple cases of fever or dysentery up here, thus earning the sobriquet.

Poor Thomas! Why had he not taken some of his medicine for his own headache? Perhaps because he had none with him this time. It might all be in that slow sailing *piragua* with his other supplies. He was so set upon traveling light —aside from his load of engine fuel— that he might have relied on speed to bring him through without need for any cures. Quite likely. But Hammond's own bag held several small bottles of pills: quinine, acetanilid, and similar drugs, brought for use in possible emergency. And now some aspirin would be just the thing. Maybe Thomas had dug it out and used it already. If not . . .

He stepped back inside, put on his helmet, picked up his gun. There was no use in hanging around here. The sun was much lower now. He was feeling strong, restless and a little anxious. He might as well be moving. He moved.

"I shall see you at the Tuparo, Marcelo," he announced, as he came forth. "Bring the carts *pronto*."

"*Cra!*" ejaculated Marcelo. "You go back there? Why, señor? You can only return here!"

"*Adios*."

Hammond marched away in the sweltering heat. Marcelo muttered something, which, translated, might have been:

"Well, of all the damned fools!"

But he did not say it aloud, nor anything else to deter the idiotic outlander. It was not his duty to stop fools from committing folly. He shrugged and turned his attention back to the job at hand.

A FEW minutes after leaving the shady shelter Hammond almost repented his decision. The sun struck him savagely. Yet its impact lacked in some degree the dire force with which it had assailed him hours ago; and he had learned something about meeting it. He walked loosely, at leisurely pace, without physical or mental strain. When he neared shady spots, more numerous now that the rays fell at a long slant, he deviated to enter them and stand a minute or two at ease. Thus conserving his reborn energy, he made the return journey with far less fatigue. When he drew near the Tuparo port he was rather leg weary and exceedingly hot, but steady and clear headed.

A hundred yards or so from the tree hidden river the road curved between a couple of big black rocks, natural landmarks designating the near termination of the tiresome traverse. Hammond remembered these well, for it was there that he had paused to look back and worry a moment over his partner's safety. Now, as he approached them, he slowed, glancing along the shapeless tree line beyond. The port was invisible to him; and he, behind those bulky stones, was likewise invisible form the port. Scraggly bushes dotting the ground at the right formed a makeshift screen behind which he probably could, if he wished, steal unobserved to the fringe along the creek and then sneak up on Thomas from an unexpected direction. That would be a boyish trick; but the random thought amused him. He would like to catch the wilderness farer by surprise, prove that he was acquiring a bit of woodsy stealth. Moved by the impulse, he forthwith turned off the wheel track and worked straight to the trees.

There, turning left, he stepped carefully along among the shadows at the edge of the open land, his soft soled shoes virtually soundless, his brown clad form

merging with the parched ground behind, his white helmet tilted back so far that its green lower brim blended with the near foliage. One of the things he had learned at recent camps was how to make use of cover and color.

Through the narrow but dense wall of tangled verdure came no glint of water, no sound of motion or life. Up ahead showed no indication that either port or road existed. The tree line seemed unbroken by any opening; and the path was hidden by an intervening undulation of scanty grassed soil. To all appearance, there was no river, no boat, no man, no other life—save myriads of mosquitoes mercilessly attacking his bare hands—within limitless leagues. Upon him grew a queer, uneasy feeling of loneliness, as if his partner had unexplainably deserted him in his absence, and he would presently reach the port only to find it empty. The sensation was vague, only half sensed, yet alarming. He stepped along a little more quickly, the smile fading from his lips.

Then he halted short. A few yards away, out from the waterside growth stepped a man. The man was not Thomas.

A tall, lank, ragged, flop sombreroed mestizo, black bearded, big nosed, holding a gun, peering along the road as if warily seeking sight of any oncoming pedestrian or rider—that was the apparition at which the jokester stared. For several seconds the sinister figure held its attentive poise. Then, without looking to right or left, it wheeled and moved back into the bush. At once sounded a harsh voice delivering commands in bastard Spanish; a brief mutter of grunting replies; a thump of something hard on wood, and a metallic clack, such as might be caused by a full gasoline can hitting another.

Astounded, Hammond stood listening. To his straining ears came several more bumps, several more unintelligible grunts. Men were in the launch, ransacking its cargo! Where was Thomas?

A moment longer the listener remained immobile. Then his mouth hardened, his eyes turned steely, his hands gripped hard on his rifle. His feet began moving with redoubled stealth. Crouching, advancing with knees bent and muscles tense, he crept forward until the baffling screen ended at the tree beneath which the launch had been moored. Then he saw all.

The launch was there. So was a dugout canoe. In both boats were short, stocky, breech clouted Indians. Between them moved others, swashing knee deep, carrying plunder from the motor craft to the hollowed log. At the edge of the water stood the mestizo, rifle under arm, watching and bossing the transfer. On the sand behind him, as totally ignored as any mere stick or stone, was Thomas.

Sprawled on a side, arms and legs lax, face blank, mouth open, he lay utterly motionless. One glance at him told his young partner the stark truth. He was dead.

CHAPTER XIV

THE AVENGER

"DAMN your stinking soul to hell!" Hammond leaped from his covert, the curse rasping through set teeth.

The mestizo spun about, facing him with jaw dropped but with gun raised.

Two shots smashed the quietude of the Tuparo.

The halfbreed's mouth twisted. He teetered on his toe. His legs suddenly gave way. A second later he collapsed into a lifeless huddle.

Hammond's rifle, fired pointblank without conscious aim, threw out its spent shell and jerked toward the nearest Indian. Hammond himself, ferocious as the wounded jaguar of Atures, tried to step forward, but staggered and stayed where he was.

His left leg was numb.

In the split second of his hesitation the menaced Indian vanished. Sidewise, he dived into the water. The rifle hung poised, then darted at another

aborigine—and got him. In a rapid succession of reports, it got others. Splash after splash geysered from the erstwhile smooth creek. An arrow or two, hastily loosed by the brown men in the canoe, flicked past the gunman, unnoticed. Then the hammer clacked on a useless firing pin. The rifle was shot out.

He flung it down, snatched out his pistol. In the screened boat a dead Indian lay half in, half out of the tiny door. Over him another, unwounded, was trying to squirm out. The pistol flashed twice before he sagged and lay still. A third, trapped inside, heaved a can of gasoline through the wire net, tearing it open. But, before he struck the water in his headlong effort to escape, a bullet thudded between his ribs. He went limp, sprawled into the river and did not reappear.

Hammond stood alone. Except the mestizo on the sand and the two Indians humped in the doorway, all the murderous canoeload had disappeared—some dead, some perhaps creeping away wounded or defenseless after swimming under water to the opposite shore. Glaring around him, he awaited further sight or sound of them, but found none. His eyes dropped to the mestizo.

"Damn you!" he repeated.

With ruthless deliberation he sighted his weapon at the greasy hair and shot again. The head jerked aside a couple of inches, then was still, the hole plainly visible. If the brute had been shamming or recuperating from the first bullet, he now was unmistakably dead.

With a couple of dragging hops, the avenger reached and seized the rifle still loosely clutched in the yellow hand. He ejected the empty shell, closed the gun, a new cartridge ready in the chamber. Once more he looked around. Then he turned to Thomas.

"Old fellow!" he choked. "Old fellow!"

His throat contracted, and he could say no more. Numb, dumb, he sank beside the body, dimly realizing that the inexplicable feeling which recently had assailed him had been premonition. Thomas had truly gone from him, never to return.

From the back of the self-reliant adventurer protruded two long cane arrows. He had had no chance to defend himself. Friend and associate of Indians though he was, he had been caught off guard and assassinated by Indians who did not know him and who were led by a renegade; murdered at the northern port of Maipures, supposedly safe, by this crew of Colombian indigenes who had come noiselessly gliding out of the savage west.

FOR SOME time Hammond squatted there, almost oblivious of his own injury. Then, as his hitherto insensible leg began to hurt, he inspected it. It was drenched with blood, and midway of the thigh was a jellied hole. He drew a handkerchief from a pocket, hitched himself to the water, bathed and bandaged the wound and crept back again.

Reaction had set in and, though he felt that he ought to do something for his murdered partner, he sat useless and helpless. There was no aid now for Thomas, anyway. He was gone.

The light lessened. A slight breeze breathed up the little river. Something creaked in the distance. It came nearer, nearer, and stopped.

"*Diabolo!*" ejaculated a voice.

Hammond started from semi-stupor and struggled to his feet, facing a gaping peon. Two others were approaching.

"*Cra! El doctor* is dead!" bawled the first comer.

"*Qué? Dios!*"

The other two swore in unison, pressing forward. Then they checked themselves, warily eying the bloody legged foreigner standing so grimly with rifle gripped in a fist. Sudden death fights between partners were nothing new down here; and the stranger looked like a hard *hombre*. The first arrival, however, came on fearlessly, all his attention fixed on the corpses.

"*Cra!*" he yelled again. "Here is that snake, Luciano Chiscas! And there are *Indios*, dead, in the *lancha! Madre de Dios*, what a fight!"

At that the hesitant pair hurried to join him, sidling past the bleak Northerner who watched but spoke no word. All three stared about, exclaimed incoherently, scowled at the arrows in Thomas's back, gaped with vast respect at the lone survivor of the brief battle, then grouped around the slain mestizo.

"Who is that thing?" suddenly rasped Hammond.

"Luciano Chiscas," repeated the leader. "A very son of the devil, señor! A killer—and worse! He went to live with the Indian dogs because all white men would shoot him at sight. There is a price on his head—"

He caught his tongue. A covetous gleam came into his eyes as he looked again at that bullet bored head which was worth much money. His fellow peons nudged each other. All three questioningly regarded the slayer who was entitled to the reward. His answering look showed no comprehension of the ghoulish thought in their minds.

"But, *cra*, who would have thought he was near here and would dare do this?" the speaker rattled on. "He was supposed to be far up the Rio Vichada, two hundred miles or more from here, and no man thought ever to see him again at the Orinoco."

"Snakes travel," grunted the fellow at his left.

A pause. Then the loquacious one nodded vehemently.

"*Sí, sí*, of course. The *Indios* on the Vichada drove him away, no doubt; they are bad ones to meddle with. So he made his way by land to those of this Tuparo and found them more agreeable. And now these came down to hunt and fish; it is dry up at their home at this time. And as they floated down here very quietly, watching and listening, they saw the *lancha* and—"

He paused again, a little uncertain.

"And caught Señor Tomás asleep," curtly finished Hammond. "He had a headache. Now we must bury him. Dig the grave."

"Here, señor? We can take them to Maipures—"

"Here."

THE PEONS walked to the canoe, in which lay several spade shaped paddles and a couple of old machetes. Hammond stooped stiffly beside his comrade, felt the pockets, found all empty. Chiscas had plundered them. But for the fact that the clothing of his victim was too small for him, he would undoubtedly have taken that also. Now his slayer, with a scowl of undiminished hatred, hobbled over to him and searched his pockets in turn. They yielded various articles, nearly all of which had been the possessions of Thomas. Among them was the Northerner's revolver, fully loaded.

Contemplating this, and then looking at the arrows driven deep into the body of the owner, his avenger reconstructed the scene as it must have been at the time when he was caught. Sickened by pain, Thomas had lain down on the cans and, as his headache slowly eased, fallen asleep. Later the canoe had, as the peon said, come floating silently down the little river, its wild brown crew and murderous passenger watching intently for any sign of men at the occasionally used port. It had paused, unseen, unheard, while those aboard watched the motorboat and listened for sounds of the masters. It had come on again, reached the sand, grounded without sound.

Its men, stealthy as creeping snakes, had stepped to the screen, discerned the unconscious figure, found the little door, flung it open, discharged ready arrows instantly. The white man was dead before he knew what had struck him. Then he had been dragged forth. Chiscas had seized his weapons.

The thinker looked down at the rifle taken from the assassin; the rifle which had wounded him, and which, but for his own quick shooting, would have killed him. He recognized it now as the bush gun of Thomas.

Yes, the mestizo had been without a

firearm, or, at least, without cartridges, when he hissed his savage associates on to the attack. Otherwise he would have consummated the crime himself. And, if the unknown partner of the murdered man had not obeyed that seemingly foolish urge to return—and the still more senseless impulse to slip aside into the bush when near his goal—the killer would have succeeded in his purpose. After looting victim and boat of all he wanted, he would have flung the former into the concealing water, abandoned the latter because he did not know how to operate it and disappeared with his gains.

The thinker flinched, stabbed by the vain regret which inevitably assails one of his breed under such circumstances. If only he had not slept at Maipures, if he had come back sooner, this might not have come about. The fact that Thomas had not expected him to return at all did not occur to him. Remorse, even though causeless, is a merciless torturer ever ready to leap on the Anglo-Saxon of New England ancestry. Now it thrust him through, hurting him so poignantly that he winced and looked about for something else on which to turn his thoughts.

The shore was empty of all life. While he mused, the peons had passed him by. After a swift survey he found them inland, laboring at the base of one of the big boulders behind which he had turned from the road.

"Hey!" he barked. "What are you doing there? I told you to dig here!"

Back came a high pitched retort:

"That place is under water at flood time! Would you have *el señor doctor* sleep under eels and crocodiles?"

"No!"

"*Bien.*"

The peons continued digging the last resting place of the man they honored. Hammond, silent, leaned on his gun. Day waned fast. At length, as the sun vanished and the brief twilight spread swift over the waste lands, the toilers plodded back. They broke off the arrows, lifted the body, bore it away. Behind them, haltingly and painfully, followed the man who had made possible the burial.

GENTLY the yellow men lowered the white one. Emerging from the pit, they stood awaiting some form of funeral service by the crippled fighter towering above them. He spoke no word. Tight lipped, he gestured with his trigger finger. With their flat wooden shovels they began throwing in dirt. He turned aside, stood mute, eyes fixed on the northern sky, where floated dark blue clouds on a field of deepening azure.

Thrup-thrup-thrup fell the gravelly earth. Unnoticed, one of the peons ceased work, stole away in the dusk toward the port. The other two mechanically continued their task. Darkness lay thick about them when they ceased. Through that gloom the third came quietly back from the river.

"Now, señor," he said, "all is done. We shall load the carts and the boat and be gone. You will ride, and Marcelo will cut out the bullet. He is clever at such work. Later we shall put up a cross here for *el doctor*. Let us go."

Hammond turned bleak eyes on him.

"Go," he bade. "The boat returns down the river."

"*Como?* You will not go on?"

"No. Get out!"

The trio stood wordless, then slowly started away.

"*Bien*," said one. "As you will, señor."

Soft footed, they walked into the dimness, became mere shadows. Hammond stood dully regarding the mound beneath which lay the man who had been guide, counselor and friend. After a time he spoke—

"Goodby, old chap."

Then he turned and hobbled back to the waterside.

As he stubbed along, a flame blazed out behind him. He turned, gun up. Then the weapon sank. The sudden light was only that of a *carraña* torch, lighted to show the peons their way homeward. The creak of dry cartwheels

resounded, and the reddish flare slowly receded. Soon it vanished between the two big stones. He stood alone in the dark.

The squeak and rumble of the crude vehicles died out. For a moment the listening man regretted his harsh dismissal and his failure to pay the workers something for their toil. But when he reached the sand and surveyed it he smiled mirthlessly and gave the matter no further thought. The peons had not gone unrewarded.

The body of Chiscas had vanished. On the white slope was a large dark stain. And now, while the corpse of the desperado drifted somewhere down the black Orinoco, bound for the jaws of crocodiles, his head was traveling overland in one of the carts.

CHAPTER XV

A BLIND MAN SEES

MOONLIGHT silvered the smooth Tuparo and the rough Orinoco. Night noises, unhuman, sounded along the black shores. At the northern *entrepôt* of the Maipures road, however, all was still. Any night prowlers which came near it kept silence, watched from secure shadow, or stole away. At the spot which had been vacant last night now lay a couple of boats, one of most primitive model, the other much more modern. Within the wrecked screening of the latter shone white lights.

Small and narrow were these bright rays, and concentrated on a limited area. They came from two electric torches lying on a gasoline can and shooting their combined beams at a bare leg. In the glare moved long hands and a short knife. Above them a tight-mouthed face looked fixedly down. Alone, a hundred miles or more from any surgeon, a wounded man was operating on himself.

The heavy bullet fired at short range by Chiscas had bored its way almost through the leg. It had missed the bone, smashed through taut thigh muscles, stopped not far from the skin at the back. To the tips of investigating fingers its hard nose was palpable through the intervening layer of untorn tissue. So, with jaw set hard and resolute will set harder, Hammond was cutting it out.

Cold sweat streamed down his face. His lips were pallid, his cheeks ashy. His breath came in sudden gasps. But the blade sank deeper, cut wider. It came out, dyed red. Finger and thumb-tip forced themselves into the gash, gripped hard on the lead. A sudden yank—

Hammond fell over, suddenly faint. For several minutes he lay, too weak to rise. Then he pushed himself up and, sitting with his back against the side of the boat, bathed the entire wound with water from a waiting cup, rebandaged it with clean handkerchiefs, contemplated the result, and looked about on the cockpit floor. From it he picked up the leaden slug which had slipped from his relaxing hand.

Soberly he eyed it. Presently he dropped it into a shirt pocket and buttoned the flap, gripped the steering wheel above him and lifted himself to his feet.

"That's that," said he. "And now—"

He looked toward the ownerless dugout, in which still lay the loot. He picked up a torch and the unfired revolver of Thomas. With these in hand he got his good leg out through the doorway, dragged the bad one after it, and then, holding the wounded limb rigid, walked slowly to the near canoe. There he sent the search ray questing all around him, discovering no new menace on water or land, pocketed the gun, laid the lamp on a paddler's seat of sticks and shoved the lightly grounded craft out until it floated free. Back he hobbled, one hand on the gunwale, drawing the Indian vessel to the side of his own. And there he stripped it bare.

All the equipment taken from the launch went back into it, and all else besides: paddles, bows, arrows, a long *tigre* spear, a tall cylindrical basket holding

various small articles of savage traveling gear. No cans of gasoline had to be transferred, for these had not been taken from the motorboat. The ignorant raiders, having no use for engine food, had merely pulled the containers about in vain search for something else hidden beneath.

When the wooden shell was empty he gave it another shove outward. Slow, somber, sullen, it drifted down along the moonlit water, following the men who had made it, to disappear for all time in the river which had swallowed them. Drawn irresistibly toward the ravening rapids of Atures ten leagues below, it would wreck itself there, battered and ground on the rocks until it was but a split and splintered piece of flotsam, forever useless.

As it floated away, Hammond hauled himself back into his own disordered ship, there to sink on the heap of retrieved plunder and sit awhile, gloomily staring at nothing. His leg now ached wickedly; and he was heart sick and soul sick. Moment by moment there grew in him a loathing of this ill omened spot, with its sneaky silence, its dense shadows, its atmosphere of assassination, its stained sands, its smell—real or fancied—of human blood.

AT LENGTH he arose, cleared the littered floor behind the wheel, opened a collapsed chair, set it firmly down. Into it he lowered himself. He turned on the ignition, pressed the starter. The boat gently quivered. The gear lever engaged. With a slow scrape the keel grated off its sandy bed. Backing, turning, then moving forward, the launch glided away from the odious shore and headed out into the perilous but open faced Orinoco.

Downstream it cruised for perhaps a mile, its driver fixedly studying water, rocks, shores. Then it obliqued over to the eastern margin, where a long spit of bare sand projected. It felt its way cautiously around the point, swung in along the lower side, went aground with a soft crunch. There Hammond surveyed the broad silver stream, the innocent sand bar, the wide spaces lying on every hand; and he drew a long breath. This place was clean.

For some time he sat there, hands still on the wheel, eyes soberly dwelling on the water which came sliding eternally down and swerved aside beyond the low bar. At length he sighed, felt absently for the pipe and tobacco which he had recently been smoking instead of cigarets, and awoke to the fact that his legs still were bare. His trousers, doffed before he began his self surgery, were on the flooring, nearly buried beneath the heap of stuff retrieved from the dugout. Feeling about, he found the cloth, hauled the garment forth. When he dug the pipe from its pocket he found it broken.

Dismayed, he stared at it; then threw the pieces aside and reached to the well-worn suitcase which had belonged to Thomas. In that, he knew, was a plentiful supply of cigarrillos and matches. It was unlocked. A packet of the strong cigarets lay ready to hand. He opened it, ignited a white roll, sucked its smoke deep down, exhaled slowly. While he drew other inhalations he contemplated other contents of the neatly packed bag.

Long packages carefully wrapped in paper held, as he remembered, immaculate white suits, white shirts, white soft collars, for use when calling on officials of upriver towns. The sight of them recalled one of the casual, yet instructive, remarks of the man who had worn them:

"These folks are a bit punctilious in matters of clothing, no matter how far back they live. To call on them in your traveling clothes is rather a slur; it makes them feel that you think they're of no importance; and, though they're too courteous to show resentment, they do resent it and remember it. So, if you expect ever to see them again, or even if you don't, it's a good idea to wear clothes which will make them feel that you respect them, whether you do or not."

This clothing, which the owner had worn last at Caicara and did not intend

to use again until he should reach San Fernando de Atabapo, governmental town of Amazonas, now lay at the bottom of the case. Scattered about over it were small articles of more immediate usefulness: packets of cigarets, boxes of matches or of cartridges, a short leather roll of toilet accessories, handkerchiefs, a small but thick notebook.

Hammond reached for that book, reached also to one of the electric hand lamps still burning on the cans behind him and turned its ray to a different angle. Then he opened the little volume, the leather covers of which were so stiff as to betray the fact that it was new; probably bought in Trinidad. The first entry proved the surmise true.

> Jan. 8—Mailed complete report to Society, also photographs to date. Doctor here would be mad as hornet if he knew I had been working on this after his warning. But what he doesn't know won't hurt him. Boarded *Delta*, 4 P.M., sailed 5 P.M. Doctor will have a fit when he learns I have gone back into Venezuela, instead of home, as ordered. But I can stick it for another four months and finish work. Sea gentle, wind mild. Usual assortment of passengers, plus one tall chap who looks American. To bed, 9 P.M. feeling good.

THE READER wrinkled his brows and studied the brief record anew. So Thomas had been ordered home by an English physician. Why? He had seemed strong enough—until a headache caught him today. And what society was this to which he had reported? There was no answer.

The next notation was even more puzzling. It was dated several days later, extremely short, and worded in Greek. Evidently the recorder had considered the trip to Bolívar, the arrival, and ensuing activities not worth chronicling. Then had come to his notice some news so secret that, even in a Spanish country, he had not written it in English. Something political, perhaps, or revolutionary; something dangerous, which he wished to take no chance of forgetting, yet which he did not purpose to let others learn if, by any chance, this little book should somehow escape his own possession. Whatever it was, it was still safe. Hammond, despite his university education, knew nothing of Greek except the alphabet; he had avoided the study as too much work, and the words now meant nothing to him. But since when had an Orinocan adventurer known that classical language well enough to employ it as an intelligible method of memorandum?

While the astonished brain of the examiner wrestled briefly and vainly with that question, his eyes traveled on to more English words. They read:

> Straightened out H. at customs. He is basically a good scout, though nearly ruined by snobbish environment. Rich man's son, Harvard Gold Coast, etc. But he may get over it. Noon temperature today 110°. Stiff wind, N. E.—

Hammond writhed, flung the book back into the open case, seized another cigaret. Puffing fast at it, he looked back through hundreds of miles and a score of days at the Hammond who had come off the steamer at Bolívar.

"Damn it!" he blurted. "How could I help it, Tom? A fellow's not responsible for the way he's been brought up!"

No voice answered, except the far, derisive bellow of an *areguato*—a howling monkey—bawling its discord at the moon. When the cigarrillo was burned to a stub he snapped it outside and again picked up the laconic diary.

Further notes were only partly comprehensible. Always taciturn, frequently abbreviated into such compact form that only the writer could have deciphered them, sometimes recorded in that secretive Greek, they meant little to the present reader, except in spots. One of those spots concerned the fight at the Puerta del Infierno. In part, it stated:

> Eyes not so good. Tried resting them after passing Infierno; opened them to find gang in ambush, both shores. H. went into trance when I snapped out of mine. Put him at wheel and shot it out. Got several. Our casualties, one gas can. H. woke up later, yearned to shatter my face. Gave him the chance on a *playa*, but he was too decent to go through with it. Good kid. Hasn't gotten his legs under him yet, but soon will. Reached Caicara near sunset, found *piragua* there . . .

From that date onward, the succinct entries repeated one salient sentence which leaped from the rest to make Hammond's frown deepen—

Eyes slightly worse.

And, near the end of the record, came the rebellious assertion:

Headaches increasing. Apparently the Trinidad doctor was right. But I'll finish my work or pass out trying!

At that the lone survivor scowled blackly.

"Poor devil!" he muttered. "He was suffering all the time! And never a word of complaint! And driving straight on, to go blind or be killed, when he could have quit any time with the best of reasons! If that's not tenacity and clean grit, what is? Tom, old fellow—"

He swallowed something, blinked rapidly, snatched a third cigaret, puffed hard.

From that point onward the scribbles were few, curt, uninteresting. Blank pages, many in number, ended the register. To the writer, the journey up the Orinoco evidently was so old that nothing concerning it was worth setting down, except the habitual record of noon temperatures and similar data which looked queer to the present peruser. He had never noticed that Thomas took those temperatures, nor even that he made any notes. And why should a trader, or other sort of money hunter, take the trouble to make such observations?

The answer was not immediately forthcoming. But when it came it staggered him.

In the rear cover of the book he found a pocket. In that repository was a newspaper clipping, which, when unfolded, proved to be an excerpt from a recent issue of *El Luchador*, published at Ciudad Bolívar. Translated, it read:

Crónica General

With much pleasure we announce the return from Trinidad, by the *Delta*, of Dr. Dwight Thomas, the intrepid explorer who during two years past has been engaged in study of the rivers and the vanishing Indian tribes of Guayana, and who bears so excellent a reputation throughout the Bolivarensian territories, where he is regarded with merited esteem by every one. The learned doctor has undergone extended medical treatment at Port of Spain with the object of overcoming the fatigue caused by long exposure to the exhausting climate of the unsettled regions in which he has employed himself. It was reported recently that he would not be able to return and resume his studies, but we are happy to announce that this rumor was erroneous.

We learned that during his stay in Trinidad the doctor sent to the American Society of Geographers, of which he is a distinguished member, a complete report of the scientific knowledge gathered by him in Guayana up to the present time, and that he soon will journey again up the Orinoco to continue his investigations, so valuable to geographers and ethnologists of all the world.

With pleasure we announce also the arrival from Nueva York of Sr. Fernando Hammond, geographer, who comes to assist Dr. Thomas. Until the present time it has been the practise of the doctor to make his investigations with no companions except the Indians among whom he worked, because this method permitted him to move about with more freedom and velocity than if he had a large party of assistants. His work now has reached the point where the aid of another scientist is needed.

Sr. Hammond is a graduate of the renowned university, Harvard. Dr. Thomas is from the university of Yale. Thus the two greatest colleges of the Northern continent now have put their representatives into the field of exploration in the least known portion of this country.

In presenting a cordial welcome to both of these distinguished gentlemen, we tender our sincere hope that their occupation will be not only successful but most pleasurable.

THOSE turgid sentences held Hammond stupefied for many minutes. Three times he pored over the entire article before he lifted his eyes. Then he sat staring at the empty night, seeing people and events far away.

He remembered the stiff necked, high chinned men in Bolívar who at first had passed him without a glance, but who later, for no evident reason, had accorded him cordial looks and polite bows. He recalled the strange ease with which his guns, gripped in the rapacious clutch of the *aduana*, had come forth when Thomas undertook to release them. He saw again the proud ex-general at Moitaco, the self

important *jefe* at Caicara, treating the "trader" and his assistant with that inexplicable hint of deference. He recollected other things which had momentarily puzzled him, but which he had put out of mind as unimportant. And he reviewed his veering surmises and ill based conclusions concerning the quiet, capable, satirically humorous little man whom every one else had respected and whom he himself had continually misjudged.

He saw now the reasons for the democratic traveler's conversations with black men in Bolívar, with yellow men along the river, with the disgraced white ex-officer at Moitaco. Thomas had simply been acquiring information of latest developments in the lawless region through which he must pass; reports, rumors, tips, hints vitally important to the success of his long run between shores whereon danger ever prowled. Sociability had drawn forth these bits of news or counsel from lowly peon and from high born plotter alike; sociability and subtlety combined. Although his motive in returning to the wilds was merely the completion of his scientific work there, he had permitted others to impute to him more mercenary purposes and thereby deceive themselves. Thus he had obtained from that schemer at Moitaco the surreptitious monition which otherwise would have been withheld.

An adroit chap, Thomas had been; dependable, honest, yet secretive. How he must have laughed, inwardly, at the newcomer who thought him a trader, a tax dodger, a smuggler! He had deliberately baited the suspicious young business scout with his own suspicions, hugely enjoying his sly joke. And what amusement he must have derived from the lofty superiority of the newly fledged college graduate who retained all his provincial prejudices, not only against the men of another race but against those of a rival university.

Hammond winced and voiced a groan. And it was not his leg that hurt. It was the sudden memory of himself haughtily informing Thomas that he was an explorer.

"Gods and devils, what an ass I've been!" he reproached himself. "What an absolute, abject nincompoop! Telling a real explorer—a real, two handed, two legged, go getting he-man of an explorer—that I was one! And never waking up to the fact that he was one, even when I could see that he was educated. And never seeing that he was sick, when I was right beside him all the time. And making that dirty crack about Yale men, to a Yale man! Good God! He didn't write down half of it! I not only didn't have my legs under me, but I didn't have my eyes open yet! I wasn't even dry behind the ears!"

He squirmed again, clenched a hand on his unwounded thigh and dug the fingers savagely into his leg muscles. For a moment he held that fierce, painful clutch, deliberately punishing himself. Then, physically and mentally, he relaxed.

"Well, Tom," he said, looking again up the lonely water, "I came through for you at the end, even if I was a dunce all the way up to here. And, wherever you are now, old chap, I guess you understand."

He laid the little diary gently back into the bag and lowered the lid. He extinguished the lights. Then, suddenly weary and weak, he let himself down, huddled on the floor, pulled a hammock partly over himself as covering, and was quiet.

Some time later, still open eyed, he muttered:

"Yes, you understand, old man. You understood long before I did."

CHAPTER XVI

A SHIP GOES OUT

THE *DELTA*, lying beside the Bolívar bank, blew a long, hoarse hoot. Her paddlewheel began to churn the water. Her white hull slid away from shore. A few minutes later she was far out, thrashing the river with full power, rushing downstream toward the faraway ocean.

Porters, messengers, wellwishers to departing friends stood in small groups at the base of the long declivity, watching the steamer diminish in the distance. At the top of that sun beaten slope, other men idled along the edge of the breezy Paseo. Slightly aloof from any others, a tall, broad shouldered, helmeted foreigner leaned on a cane, silently looking after the vessel on which he had come into this country and could have gone out. Venezuelans nearby, though respectfully refraining from disturbing his meditative mood, covertly observed him, occasionally exchanging secretive comments.

"Who is that one?" a late arrival quizzed an acquaintance.

"*Qué?* You do not know? That is the Señor 'Am-mond, the *científico* who went up the river with the Doctor Tomás and avenged his death. He shot one Chiscas, an outlaw, and many *Indios*, who had killed the doctor. And then, all alone, he cut a bullet of Chiscas out of himself and brought the boat of the doctor back down here, asking no help. He is a man most strong!"

The inquirer stared. Then a corner of his mouth lifted in a sneering smile.

"Heh! That is the story he tells!" he scoffed. "I remember him now. I did not recognize him, his face has grown so pale and thin. But he is the *Americano* who came two months ago, and who nearly fainted and fell into the river when he saw a detective shoot two criminals right down yonder. That one is a fighter of outlaws and Indians? Pah!"

He spat on the sidewalk.

"You are from the country, you *jibaro!*" retorted the other. "You live in that ignorant Soledad, across the river, and you had better go back there *muy pronto*, if you would keep out of trouble. It is as I say. There is proof. Only yesterday came in Salomón Gorgotero, a trader of the Alto Orinoco, who passed through Maipures and had the tale from men there, who not only saw the dead men but cut off the head of Chiscas, on which there is a price. And this señor himself told the facts in delirium here after he arrived, when he was in the hospital and knew not what he said. He was mad from his wound when he reached this place. His leg was as big as two, *caramba*, and he fought the men who carried him up the bank, saying he would walk on his own feet, when he was scarce able to crawl on hands and belly! The surgeon said that if he had not cut out that bullet himself he would have lost not only his leg but his life, because on that cursed upper river every hurt becomes poisoned. But now he is whole again, except for weakness. Now if you still think this is all a lie, walk over there and insult him. But say a prayer as you go! His wound is in the leg, not in his hands."

The scoffer did not accept the invitation. After another look at the outlander he softly withdrew.

THE STEAMER now had shrunk to a small white spot on a thin ribbon of yellow water. All at once it disappeared into dull green woods. It was gone, not to be seen again for days. The waterside watchers stirred, climbed the hill, dispersed across the *prado*. Most of them, in passing, glanced at the tall man still leaning on the steel strong cane of Venezuelan *palo de oro*. Several loitered momentarily nearby as if desirous of addressing him; then, without speaking, walked on. When at length he moved, he was alone.

Across the driveway he sauntered, limping slightly, to an empty cement bench in the shade of a bullet pitted tree. There he sat, looking thoughtfully at the ground. On the steamer traveled a letter. His thoughts still followed it.

Addressed to an elderly gentleman in Boston, it read:

DEAR FATHER:

The Orinoco plan is no good. I have been up the river far enough to prove it. Call it off and save your money.

It has been tried before, and failed. I don't know what company made the attempt. But I have seen wreckage of a good cargo boat, and heard of others, abandoned because conditions were impossible. That was in Castro's time.

Conditions may be better now, but I have found no proof that they are.

There is no security for the investment. The Orinoco country is lawless and practically unprotected. Robbers and rebels operate at will. That is what killed the other company.

Navigation is unimproved and extraordinarily hazardous. Millions could be sunk in improving it. Other dangers (from murderous Indians or worse whites) would still remain. The game is not worth the candle. Forget it.

There are other adverse factors, of which I shall tell you more later. But I repeat: *Forget it!* If the man who tried to sell you this idea disputes my judgment make him come down here. I'll show him things that will shut him up.

The Venezuelan people in general are a good sort. The more I see of them the better I like them. I have decided to stay a while longer and see more of them. I might as well. Besides, I am a bit lame at present. While I was up the river I bumped a leg, and find walking a trifle difficult, so I am resting. It's nothing serious. Just a soreness of the muscles. Don't worry.

Soon after my first arrival here I made the acquaintance of Dr. Dwight Thomas, an explorer, member of the American Society of Geographers, and Yale graduate, who has been here two years. He gave me assistance of priceless value. Now I am reliably informed that he was killed by Indians, on February 2 or 3, at the mouth of the Rio Tuparo, just below the rapids of Maipures. Please notify the Geographers' Society.

Thomas was a prince of a fellow. Sometime I shall tell you how much he did to help me. It would take too long now. But I will say that he knew my object here, was much in favor of such a project, yet was too honest to hide any of the obstacles to its success. By doing this he saved us from an expensive and disastrous venture. I think it would be decent of us to try to acknowledge our debt to him in some way which would please him if he could know. He once mentioned that he had no relatives, so we could do nothing along that line. But I wonder if we could establish a scholarship or endow a chair at Yale, named after him, to encourage study of South America. I think he would like that. I wish you would consider the idea and see what can be done.

That's all for the present. More later, perhaps. Love to mother.

FERD

SUCH was the blunt report of the business scout of Hammond and Company; a single page of small but clear chirography which could be read in a few minutes, yet had cost hours of consideration and composition, with frequent deletions before the penning of the final draft. Now that it had gone, the mind of the writer still followed it. Had he said too much? Had he written anything which might cause worriment to his parents? His mother, though immersed in society affairs, would become hysterical if she should glean from that note any hint of his recent actual experiences. His father would cable an imperious command to return home at once. Neither of these developments would be in accord with his desires or intentions.

Once more he reviewed the missive. His thoughts drifted to the notes so carefully recorded in his book, none of which had gone into the tactiturn message; to the voluminous, exhaustive statement he had started to make, but had not made. Then he jerked a shoulder as if throwing off a burden. He had said enough to kill the project and to cover all necessary ground. So that ended it. His brow cleared. He drew out a cigarillo, lighted it, relaxed more comfortably on the settee.

The lusty breeze frolicked around him, the leaves rustled cheerily above him, the soft sounds of leisurely business life floated from behind him. Up in Boston it was not much like this at this hour. Snow, slush, biting wind, harsh grind of wheel traffic, stench of automobile exhausts, hurry of business driven hordes, the whole snarling fight of human atoms for existence. He visioned it all in a few seconds and blew a long, lazy convolution of smoke at it. Three or four months hence, when trees now bare were green again and balmy airs of springtime moved across an erstwhile frozen land, he might sail northward. But not yet. Not until he had rested longer here and seen more of . . .

FOOTSTEPS, quiet but purposeful, broke into his reverie. He glanced up quickly. At the end of his bench was a solid framed, firm jawed, friendly faced Venezuelan, wearing a business suit of unobtrusively expensive cloth and a stiff straw hat. As gray and

brown eyes met, the newcomer nodded and smiled.

"*Buenos dias, señor,*" he greeted. "Will you share your seat with me a moment?"

Two months ago Hammond might have given the intruder only a cool stare. Now he cordially assented—

"*Con mucho gusto.*"

And he began, with a little difficulty, to move over.

"No, no, do not move!" swiftly objected the other. "There is space to spare."

He sat, and, wasting no time in platitudes, spoke directly.

"You are the Señor Hammond who went up the river with Doctor Thomas, are you not? I regret that I could not have met you sooner; I was away, at Caracas, when you arrived, and this is my first opportunity to talk with you. I knew Doctor Thomas, and I am inexpressibly grieved by his death. Will you not tell me just how it came about? One is not always sure, you know, that common report is accurate."

Hammond frowned slightly. But the look and tone of the inquirer manifested genuine concern. So, in his halting Spanish, he narrated the events at the Tuparo. When he finished, the Venezuelan looked soberly out at the river.

"It is a pity," he said. "A very great pity! The doctor was not only a scientist but a man—if you comprehend me, señor. An honest, sincere, wholesome man, totally unselfish, free from all conceit, altogether fearless, and worthy of more respect than the commander of any army."

"He was all of that," feelingly agreed the American.

The visitor studied him sidewise. Then he asked—

"And you, señor, are now regaining your strength?"

"*Sí.* I am a little tired. But soon I shall be the same as new."

"Not quite the same, I think," differed the other. "Seldom is a man quite the same after such a grievous experience. Yet in the end you may be all the more strong for having undergone it. *Quién sabe?*"

Hammond said nothing. A slow flush dyed his wan face as he glanced toward the anchorage where, two months ago, he had retreated from revolver shots.

"Pardon. Perhaps I have blundered," quickly apologized the Spaniard. "I meant only to say that—ah—a strong man sometimes grows more strong through adversity, you comprehend. And now tell me. Do you intend to carry on the work of the doctor, or—"

He paused, his expression interrogative. For several seconds Hammond made no reply. Then he bluntly countered—

"Why do you ask?"

His inquisitor smiled and arose.

"Because, señor, I should like to see the work go on to its conclusion. It is hard and dangerous, but— Well, if you wish to take it up where the doctor had to lay it down, be assured that I shall assist you in any way within my power. And, whether or not you do so, I shall be honored if you will visit me whenever you find it convenient."

He nodded and turned to go.

"I say!" blurted Hammond. "Who are you?"

"My name is Perez."

"Perez? Perez? What, not General Perez, Governor Perez?"

"I have that honor."

WHILE Hammond still stared, the powerful executive of the largest state of Venezuela touched his hatbrim in semi-military salute and walked briskly away. A few yards distant, he entered a quiet automobile, hitherto unnoticed by the lounger on the bench, which at once glided off. Along the farther side of the esplanade, attentive watchers gazed with redoubled respect at the outlander for whom their ruler had halted his car and with whom he had conversed so companionably under the trees. Such a compliment was seldom accorded any one by General Perez.

When the machine faded from sight behind the park trees the white helmet turned riverward once more. Beneath its brim the hollow cheeks glowed and

the tired eyes shone. Had the sidewalk observers behind him seen his expression then, they would have ascribed it to pride at being thus honored. It never could have occurred to them that this señor, though surprised and momentarily gratified, did not fully appreciate—in truth, had already forgotten—the distinction conferred on him; that his mind was not dwelling on the moments just past, but speeding into the future; or, still more incredible, that that future was carrying his thoughts back up the merciless river from which he had recently escaped. Still less could they have understood, if they had heard, the muttered words which presently emerged from his pale lips, to be snatched away by the wind and lost.

"That's right, Tom. A scholarship or a chair is all right—but finishing the job is better. I'm with you!"

He slid a hand into a pocket, drew out something, leaned forward, elbows on knees, gaze fixed on the object in his palm—a blunt bullet, fired not long ago amid the shadows of the Rio Tuparo. As he contemplated it his mouth grew hard, his jaw harder. The ugly slug was symbolic, recalling a dolorous past, foreboding an even more tragic future. But when he looked up his eyes were fearless and determined. And when they dwelt on the far distance they resumed their steady gleam. Once more they saw in retrospect hazy expanses full of unknown mountains, hidden fastnesses untrodden by white feet, unnamed streams, mysteries unsolved . . .

The idlers along the Paseo, losing interest in the motionless figure under the tree, turned to other considerations. The ceaseless wind rattled the leaves, roughed the waters, swept ever onward, westward, upstream. And nobody, except, perhaps, the astute Governor Perez, suspected that an explorer, heretofore embryonic, had just been fully born on the Calle Orinoco.

FIVE MINUTES

A Story of the Waterfront

By JOHN MURRAY REYNOLDS

THE TARNISHED brass clock on the wall struck the hour of ten. It actually sounded four strokes—two double beats—for it kept ship's time.

It was very quiet in the shipping master's office, the little shack at the head of an old pier. The morning sun showed up the griminess of the windows and walls, and a few large flies droned noisily above the tobacco stains on the floor. Only two men were waiting in the outer office, both half asleep.

At his desk behind the little railing the shipping master hung up the phone receiver and yawned before speaking.

"The *Bjorn*, Norwegian, is down at Pier Nine. She needs one ordinary. Which of you was here first?"

The two drowsy derelicts came to life, and the little one bounded to his feet.

"Right 'ere, Guv'nor!"

With an indignant grunt the big red head reached out one hairy paw and dragged him back.

"Yer full o' case oil," he rumbled. "I was after being here a full minute before you."

"Aw, go soak yer ruddy 'ead!" shrilled the Cockney, twisting out of the other's grasp.

The shipping master looked bored, and reached for a cigaret. All he found was a battered and empty package. He glanced at the clock, and then stood up.

"Settle it between you," he said. "I'll be back in a minute."

When he had gone the two seamen glared at each other belligerently. The big Irishman was aggrieved, for he had really been first in the office.

"Wot's the idea, Cocky," he growled. "Your turn'll come."

The little man snarled an oath, and the other snorted and struck him an open handed blow that smacked like a pistol shot. As the cockney staggered back a newcomer appeared in the doorway.

SO TALL he dwarfed the Irishman and made the other seem a pigmy, he had a sullen, ugly face that was somehow distinctly evil. As his eyes fell on the Irishman they lighted with triumph and he grinned—a ghastly grimace. One scarred hand slipped under his coat.

"Red Flanagan, by God!"

His harsh voice was vibrant with an evil triumph.

The Irishman seemed to grow a little pale as he looked at the newcomer, while the Cockney watched both in wonder. Flanagan's fists clenched and he crouched a little.

"Is it you, Ericson?" he said hoarsely.

"Aye, it's me, you dirty rat! You got away in Rio, but you won't today." His right hand came out from under his coat, and the sunlight glinted on the rusty blade of a long knife. "I'll teach you to steal a wench from *me!*"

"She wanted to get away. You'd half killed her as it was."

The Swede spat contemptuously.

"What was that to you?"

Flanagan was a battle scarred veteran of a hundred fights, and far from a coward, but there was murder in the other's eyes. The knife was a terrible advantage. He licked his lips and backed away a little.

"Put down that knife and I'll fight ye."

"Fight hell!! We've fought before!" exploded Ericson. "This time I'll slit yer pipe!"

The giant moved warily forward, holding the knife on a line with his right hip. Flanagan watched him through narrowed eyes and circled a little to the left while the cockney, forgotten, crouched in a corner.

Suddenly the giant Swede leaped forward and struck with his left fist. Flanagan sidestepped the swing and edged a little more to the left. As Ericson recovered and paused, the Irishman darted in with surprising quickness, landed two blows to the body, dodged the knife and then slipped past and jumped for the door. Ericson bounded in pursuit, to fall with a crash on the threshold. The Cockney had tripped him as he passed through the door.

Ten feet from the office was the dock edge, and the force of the fall jarred the knife from Ericson's hand. It rattled across the planking, balanced a moment on the edge of the stringpiece and then dropped to the water below. With a sudden grin and a relieved chuckle, Flanagan turned. Ericson staggered to his feet and rushed forward with wildly swinging arms.

For a moment the two men sparred on the very edge of the dock, exchanging heavy, thudding blows. Then Flanagan landed one on the side of Ericson's jaw that shook him badly. The big Swede stepped back with a grunt and lost his footing. He toppled over the dock edge and fell with a mighty splash to the muddy water below. Flanagan stood staring and the Cockney wandered over with his hands in his pockets, but Ericson did not come up. That corner of the waterfront was deserted, and no one had seen.

A minute later the Irishman straightened up from staring at the water and scratched his head.

"Guess he's gone, Cocky. Well, it's no loss. Ericson was bad, rotten bad. But it looks like you're after saving my life."

The little man grunted casually, and they reentered the office just before the shipping master reappeared.

"Well," he said, as he glanced at the two drowsy figures on the bench, "who ships on the *Bjorn?*"

"M'friend here," said Flanagan, pointing a thumb at his companion.

"Anything come up while I was gone?" The shipping master dropped into the desk chair as he spoke.

"Naw," said Flanagan sleepily, ignoring alike drama, battle and death. "Not a thing."

It was just five minutes after ten.

The First American Merchant Marine

By

Arthur Woodward

THE FIRST fleet of all American merchant marine destined to trade with Europe and other points east was organized somewhere around 1680 or thereabouts, perhaps earlier. The members of the crew were decidedly all American, both in the matter of blood and in point of view.

It was like this: When the old fashioned, pot bellied sailing vessels hailing from old England dropped anchor in a certain port on what is now the North Carolina coast, they brought with them a certain amount of goods destined for the Indian trade.

Now like all good mariners the captains of the ships stuck to charted channels and so brought their vessels to approximately the same anchorage each time.

On shore, the members of the Seewee tribe of Indians, who were the recipients of the trade goods, noted the exact course each ship took coming into the port and decided that since these vessels came so straight to their berths and always managed to find the same port each time, that England, the country whence the white traders came could not be far away.

They also decided that since the traders who dispensed colored beads, iron mongery and guns—that went off sometimes and sometimes didn't—were profiting several hundred per cent. on each transaction, there was no use giving the cold blooded traders all the profit.

If these rum cutting traders could go to England and return so quickly with a cargo of precious stuffs and exchange them for equally fine dressed deer skins and furs there was no reason why the Indians couldn't dispense with the cheating middleman and do a little first hand dealing themselves.

At any rate this was the argument that circulated around the council fires in the cabins of the Seewee. Accordingly, a tribal company was formed with all the able bodied men as the principal shareholders. Those who were good hunters immediately got busy with their guns and traps while the boat builders began the construction of the profit sharing fleet. They worked secretly so that the Englishmen would not get wind of the exploit and attempt to thwart them.

In time a great fleet of cypress dugouts was ready. Mat sails had been manufactured by the Seewee women. Loads of furs, hides and garden produce began to come in. Soon the cargoes were ready. One morning the first all American trading venture got under way. The canoes, deeply laden with tanned skins, corn and other items, and manned by exultant, chattering Seewees, pushed off and sailed into the sunrise. Those who remained behind were downcast at being prohibited from taking the little junket to England.

But we are told by the chronicler that the canoes had no sooner got fairly out to sea and out of sight of land than a great storm arose. The canoes that didn't founder were later picked up by British north bound ships and the crestfallen crews sold into slavery. Such was the fate of our first American merchant marine. Incidentally it marked the first seizure and impressment of American sailors by a foreign power.

The author of "The Way of Sinners" gives us a vigorous story of Medieval Italy and a rebel whose spirit was stronger than the walls of his dungeon

OF RESOLUTION

By F. R. BUCKLEY

TO HIS Lordship, the very amiable and condescending good lord Cosimo, Count of Trastelli, Tyrant of Bugasto, Lord of Portarica and so on; from Luigi Caradosso, Captain-General in the service of his Grace my Lord Duke of Costecaldo, these:

Good my lord;

I AM TOUCHED to the heart by the dispatch just received from your Lordship. I had no idea, speaking over the cups in my tent last Thursday sennight, that your Excellency would take so much to heart my words concerning the collection of the poll tax in Portarica. Certes there was reason in my advice that this tax, once proclaimed by your Lordship, must be collected despite the protests of the council, and rage the population never so much; but also I was visibly drunk at the time, and in long years I have found it the practise among gentlemen of your Lordship's age, to ascribe all advice by seventy-year-olds entirely to drink or the lunacy of age, and so avoid the trouble of following such counsel.

Since I am asked, I willingly put my old fingers at your Lordship's service and say that by ancient experience in the service of princes (including that of Guglielmo III of Rometia, whom God assoil) I have come to believe that one single quality differentiates the rulers of mankind from those destined to be ruled. I mean the quality of resolution; otherwise called—by its victims, but also by those who would fain monopolise it for themselves—obstinacy, pig headedness and the like.

Whether foully or fairly described it is, in short, the ability to insist that one's will prevail over all others; reason, morals, laws, and the natural feelings of humanity to the contrary notwithstanding. It is an ability pertaining peculiarly to individuals, and by no means to be acquired by mobs. Thus princes, in the days when they were absolute, taking advice from none, had a woundy advantage over their subjects; which now—for some reason doubtless known to God, but to me unimaginable—they are throwing away by the engagement of councils, parliaments and so forth.

And since these councils, despite their small numbers and their robes of office, are but mobs, they act after the natural fashion of mobs; explaining, arguing and discussing; measuring that which they wish to do by the standard of what custom saith they should do; reversing decisions already made, for no better reason that the said decisions have been shown to be unreasonable or unfounded upon facts; and so bringing royalty into discredit and leaving the greater mob, whose methods they have adopted, leaderless and unhappy.

BUT I am no Machiavelli to be writing theories. I knew him when he was with the Duke of Valentinois, and a nasty sneering sidling fellow he was. If it is agreeable to your Lordship I will endeavor to illustrate my meaning by a narrative from the life; whereunto I preface the remark that while resolution is a quality peculiar (as aforesaid) to individuals, it is not necessary that those individuals be princes. Certain there be among the commonalty that are born with this characteristic; indeed, rebellions are often no more than conflicts of determination between a prince and one of these.

Such, indeed, was the rebellion which broke out in Rometia just after my promotion to a sergeantcy in the guard; and the fact that we crushed it as easily as we did was due neither to virtue of ours nor weakness on the part of this Carlo Bonaventura who led the rising; but solely to the fact that this latter was not let to have his will unhampered.

A council of his captains forced him (when he was driving us before him like sheep in the open country) to cease this pursuit and occupy the city of Monte-

rosso; and when we had carried the siege of this place to starvation point, it was this same council of captains that compounded with the duke and delivered Carlo into our hands with the conscience-salving proviso that the duke should not put him to death.

"Who accepted this surrender?" asked Guglielmo, when we had returned to the capital and brought our prisoner before his dining table. According to his habit, the duke was eating delicately from golden dishes with a little skewer; and from time to time he would wipe his hands on the head of a great dog that sat by his chair.

"Your Grace—" says I.

"How now?" says the duke. "I am addressed by a sergeant?"

"May it please your Highness, his Honor the captain had the misfortune to be killed. Also both the lieutenants and the four sub-lieutenants."

His lordship, showing no other signs of feeling, appeared to lose taste for his food. He put down the little skewer, and wiped his hands in the manner aforesaid, and fixed on me a mild gaze that turned my spine to water.

"So," says he slowly, "and after such losses, thou didst commit me to the pardoning of this fellow that brought it all about. No thought of sending to me for an officer who should relieve thee. A sergeant, thou didst cheerfully become plenipotentiary. Eh?"

"May it please your Highness," says I, shaking violently at the knees, "there was no talk of pardon; merely the sparing of his life. As for sending to your Grace for orders, it was the opinion of his Honor the captain that we had better seize upon the terms offered, before the rebels could change their minds. This prisoner is a very dangerous, determined and persuasive man, my lord."

"For which exact reason," says Guglielmo, "I had publicly sworn to drown him in the castle moat. It is as well for Master Captain that he died. He should have helped me keep what was possible of that promise. As for thee, Sergeant . . ."

THE PRISONER was in our midst, of course, shackled neck to hands and hands to feet; a tall, thin ragged fellow with great blazing black eyes in a haggard face. At this moment, I thanked God, his appearance caught the attention of the duke; who left me and, leaning back, fastened his gaze on Carlo Bonaventura. And, merciful heaven, what a gaze!

Yet the rebel supported it without flinching; nay, so far as I could see out of the corners of my eyes, he returned the stare with interest. He was, as I am later to show, a remarkable man.

"So!" says Guglielmo; and took an orange from a dish. I can see him now, in his vermilion robe trimmed with squirrel, biting the fruit and considering his prisoner. Knowing Guglielmo, it occurred to me that it would be better to be the orange than the prisoner aforesaid.

"So!" says the duke again. "I am not to put thee to death, eh? Not to drop thee in the moat as I promised myself and the hard working of my subjects. Hm!"

He pondered.

"What," he inquired, "dost thou do for a living—when there are no rebellions to be raised?"

Carlo made no answer.

"Strike him across the mouth," says the duke to my corporal; and it was done, with a steel glove.

The rebel bled, and there was a splinter of tooth that stuck through his lower lip; but he remained silent.

"Indeed," says the duke. "Well, no matter. Let us assume that thou art a stone mason. I would sooner have drowned thee in the moat, since that is the letter of my promise; but since the spirit was to remove thee from leadership, another way may do as well. We will proceed by the method of ridicule. So shall we have thee build a monument to me, midway between the castle and the town. Nothing elaborate, well understood; a pile of stones will do, so it be big enough. Shall we say—shall we say a pyramid, of the height of six men? I think that would do; of worthy and sizable

stones, naturally; shall we put the weight of the smallest at an hundred pounds? Nay, thou'st a likely look; we will say a hundred and fifty. Is it heard, Corporal?"

The corporal saluted. As for me, I trembled more than ever. Thus ignored, I felt myself already dead.

"It is sad," says Guglielmo, "that by the building of the castle wherein we find ourselves at this auspicious meeting, the land hereabouts was robbed of its natural rock; and still more sad that I can not spare thee horses and mules to assist in the bringing of material from the quarry on the far side of my town. But after all, what is the purpose of this work, if not to show the inhabitants that such as set themselves up against their liege lord must in the end do his bidding, even to the leveling of themselves with donkeys? And I will assign four soldiers with leather whips to make the way seem shorter. The working day will be that of our four footed brethren—from sunrise to sunset, commencing tomorrow. Corporal—is it heard?"

The corporal saluted again.

But also, there were words from Carlo Bonaventura.

"I shall not work," says he.

My lord the duke was not a man easily astonied; indeed I remember, during forty years, to have seen his jaw drop but twice. The other occasion was when an ambassador refused a bribe.

"What?" demanded his Grace.

"I will not work," says Carlo.

"Will not—"

Guglielmo recovered himself and laughed.

"Ah," says he. "Thou mistakest me, in thy natural confusion, for one of thy late associates, the plow tail captains. But when I have said that thou shalt move rocks, and thus re-establish my credit with my subjects, believe me that there is no more to be said. Take him away, Corporal—to the dungeon. And tomorrow—the whips, you understand."

As the corporal saluted, the duke's eyes fell on me.

"Take this—this diplomat," says he, pointing to me lazily, "and put him in the cell with the object of his benevolence. I will consider his case. Dismissed!"

II

SO, TO spare your Lordship the account of a very uncomfortable night, during which a rat bit a large piece out of my left ear—and it hath not grown again to this day—the corporal and the soldiers came for Carlo in the morning, to take him forth to build monuments; and he would not rise from his corner. So they kicked him to his feet, and then he would not walk to the door of the cell. They had to push him. After the which I saw him no more until night, when the corporal's file returned and deposited my cellmate on the mud floor, unconscious.

"Did he work?" I asked of the corporal.

"Nay. Not to the extent of a pebble, Luigi. 'A's cut almost to ribbons for't, but 'a's a virgin still. What the duke's to say, I know not. If we flog him more, 'a'll die."

"And if 'tis known he defied the duke thus, there'll be another rebellion within the year," says I.

"Well," says my corporal; and, leaving me a flask of wine he had smuggled in memory of past favors, departed to the good warm guardroom and his evening meal.

As for me, I endeavored to distract my thoughts by crawling over and, after that I had found Carlo by the sense of touch, trying to revive him. At first I thought he was dead, so faintly did he breathe and so imperceptible was the beating of his heart; but when I had forced a little of the wine down him he struck me a feeble blow in the face and said he would not work though I boiled him in oil.

"That's over—for today," says I soothingly. "Drink this, and change thy mind about tomorrow."

Now came he back from the dead with enthusiasm, pushing me away, calling me a traitor to the class that gave me birth, and otherwise acting ungratefully, con-

sidering that I could have put the wine to an excellent use myself.

"If my spirit be broken," he cried in his high, weak voice, "so shall be the spirit of the people of this duchy. If they see me firm under the duke's very hand, they may be shamed into standing firm against his inquities. *Viva il popolo!*"

"Alas, my poor brother," says I. "How shall their standing firm on some other occasion avail thee? Thou'lt be dead without killing within the week."

He made no answer to that, and would not speak again throughout the night. Indeed, I think he fell into a sort of stupor arising from his wounds and his long standing in the hot sun of the rock quarry; from which, nevertheless, he aroused himself sufficiently to refuse to rise when the corporal's file came for him again next morning.

"Be gentle with him," I warned the corporal as they carried their victim forth. "Another whipping, and he dies; and where then is the duke's promise?"

"Without it, where's the duke's promise that he shall work for his living?" gasps the corporal, maneuvering Carlo's head around the door post. "I wish this were thine affair, Luigi. Stand up, thou rebel dog!"

So the door closed; and, fifteen hours later, it opened again, once more to admit the file and Carlo Bonaventura, this latter weary to the bone, but not more cut with the whips than he had been the night before, and with his hands still unroughed by toil.

"No success?" says I, accepting my flask from the corporal.

"Nay. And the duke's sent for me to ask why the monument hath not been begun. God's everlasting fire consume and burn all rebels!"

AND SO it went on for a week, on the seventh day whereof (not a stone having yet been moved from the quarry, and Carlo being so near the edge of death that naught more dare be done to him) we were honored by a visit from the duke in person. He came down to see us, dressed in a beautiful suit of pale green taffeta, and holding a nosegay to protect him from the stench of the cells.

"Hold the lantern to his face," says Guglielmo, burying his nose in the flowers; and I saw that, near as he might be to death, Carlo's eyes still held the expression they had had in the banquet hall. Too weak to raise his head, he still glared at his oppressor with the same defiance.

"It is unfortunate," says the duke, as though to himself. "Just when I am about to proclaim new taxes, too. This defiance will make them woundy hard to collect."

He scratched his chin and bent over Carlo.

"Tell me, fellow, is there no means whereby I can induce thee to work?"

Carlo made a hoarse sound that might have been aye or no; but shook his head.

"I must apply my mind to the question," says Guglielmo in the same thoughtful tone. "To be defied thus will much impair— Ah, Master Sergeant Diplomat, I had forgotten thee. Did I not say thou wert to be in chains? Corporal, have the armorer shackle Signor Caradosso to that wall. We will return to daylight."

Scarce had the which been done, and the armorer retired—leaving me, good thoughtful fellow, another *fiasco* of wine and the half of a roast chicken—than from the far corner of the cell came the voice of Bonaventura, strangely strong.

"Caradosso!"

"Aye?" I demanded through the neck of the bottle.

"Caradosso, he—he hath dropped a file."

It was some time before I could gather the cause of the man's excitement. At first I thought he was proposing to cut my shackles, which would not have been worth the trouble, since the armorer had made them very loose and comfortable, and since my freedom would have been discovered at the next mealtime. And when he explained his plan in so many words, I could not at first believe he was serious.

Imagine that it was his intention, with that miserable bit of steel not longer than a man's hand, to cut and burrow his way out of that cell to freedom!

"We are here in the outer tier of cells—I saw that when we were brought here," says he feverishly. "On the other side of this wall is the moat, and on the far side of the moat—"

"Aye, but," says I, "the wall deserves more than passing consideration. I'm no engineer, but it will be ten ells thick, or more than that."

"No matter," says Carlo Bonaventura; and, as the Lord witnesseth me, he crawled over to the wall and began scratching without further delay.

"At least come and eat this legbone of chicken," says I, humoring the madman; but he would not; nor even would he spare time from his lunatic work to take a sup of wine.

So that I deputized for him in these regards and, following the meal, went to sleep. How long I slept (since day and night were all one in the dungeon) I have no way to tell; but when I awoke Carlo was still busy with his scratching.

WHEN I spoke to him, he abandoned it and came close to me.

"Caradosso," says he in a strange, hard tone.

"Aye?"

"I require an oath of thee," says Bonaventura, "in default whereof I take advantage of thine irons and strangle thee to death."

"A nice cellmate!" says I.

"I have a duty to the people," says Carlo. "I must escape. Swear that thou'lt not betray this work of mine."

Well, I had already seen that to say aught of the matter would be to get my good friend the armorer a flogging, if not worse, for being so careless with his tools; so I promised without hesitation. Besides, I was sorry for Carlo; and then again, his attempt was so foolish as to need no betrayal.

He might, methought, loosen one stone of the wall before his file wore out or a jailer discovered the dust of his operations; and thereafter he would of necessity sit quiet and wait for natural death to give him the release which the duke could not grant.

"Amuse thyself while thou'rt able, poor brother," says I. "It is sworn. Have some wine."

"By the Saints?" demands Carlo.

"Surely. By the Saints."

"By thy hope of release from this place, and of salvation hereafter?"

"Aye, aye. In short, I promise thee on mine honor as a soldier. Now drink."

But he would not; nay, he returned to his scraping as though the loss of a minute would be wicked; and it was to the sound of his file, working away at the bitter hard plaster of those wall joints, that I went to sleep—then, and many times after.

Indeed, before my term in prison came to an end, and I was restored to duty in the guard, I had grown so used to this noise as of a rat nibbling a floor board, that I was startled whenever it ceased and Carlo lay down for an hour or two of sleep. Never, to my memory, did he take more than that; and when he would awake from such naps he would work with redoubled fury, to compensate for the time thus lost.

His face (as I perceived at mealtimes, in the thrice muddied light from the corridor) was leaden of color, his eyes sunken as it were into tunnels, and his fingers were in ribbons of blood. Still he worked on.

Resolution, my lord: Determination! Considering that this man was nigh dead when he found the file, art thou not of accord that it can accomplish miracles?

I was released on the very day which saw him remove his first stone. It was as heavy as himself, almost; he groaned in agony as he lifted it clear—and it would be necessary for him to lift and replace it three times a day, if he were to continue his work without discovery; but so keen was his joy that he burst into tears.

"And, Caradosso," says he in the

hoarse whisper that was all his speech, "the wall is rubble filled!"

Meseemed that this was final ruin.

"Alas!" says I. "What art thou to do with the matter thou shalt pull out?"

"I shall find a way," says Carlo. "I must return to lead the people."

III

RELEASED, I forgot him; which may seem strange until I explain to your Lordship that the news of Carlo's successful defiance of the duke had spread; and that, as a result, small rebellions, or at least stonings of tax collectors and suchlike, were become common in the land.

Restored to my rank, and later promoted to lieutenant in place of one caught alone by the peasantry at Trastevere, I was hither and yon about the country, with scarce time to eat and sleep between the hangings of ringleaders and the burnings of their villages.

During which time of horror, his Grace the duke seemed to take actual pleasure in making state progresses and exhibiting himself to the people as lazier and more careless than ever. He had been reading (as he told me later, when he had become a mighty dog of war) some Greek book whose title escapes me, and from it had adopted this foolish ideal of manners. Even his pride of horsemanship had been abandoned; he now traveled in a litter—at thirty years of age! And during audiences with syndics and the rough, sweat stained chiefs of farming hamlets, he would have a girl anoint his brow with perfumes, while he himself sucked an orange. Contempt for him (having been seeded by his defeat with Carlo) grew with his every appearance. It was evident to me that only a leader was necessary for that the duchy should break out into a rebellion ten times more determined than that in which Bonaventura had been captured.

And, on the day when Guglielmo decided to proclaim a new tax he had long had in contemplation (indeed, it was the same he had mentioned to himself, that night in the dungeon) I joined my captain in exposing this danger to the duke.

"Aye," says he, lolling on cushions, "but where is the said leader?"

Neither of us had an answer.

"Possibly thy former cellmate," says his Grace, looking at me in a way that made my heart stop, "will escape and head this new revolt. Is that thy thought, Lieutenant?"

My mouth was dry with apprehension; but mine oath held me silent. And after all, I need not have feared; for evidently the duke had spoken at random.

"I will engage myself for him," he laughed. "Are there other rebel generals in sight?"

"Nay," says the captain, "but one may arise—especially with this new tax to—"

"Pish!" says the duke. "Tush, good soldiers. I know my affair, believe me. Besides, I am not to announce this new contribution in the usual way. Two days hence I shall give a *fiesta* on the plain between castle and town and, as it were, insinuate the news into the ears of my loving subjects during the festivities. By the way, Caradosso, see that news of this affair is spread into the country districts, especially the hills, where the rebels are. All are invited, and there shall be wine enough to float ships. Dismissed!"

"He hath softening of the brain!" moans my captain, when we had reached the guardroom. "Gathering an army of rebels at the castle gates! Caradosso, get out the light culverins from the store—aye, and those old leather things we had discarded. We shall need them all before this *fiesta* is at an end. Madness, madness! Why did I leave the service of Venice to come here?"

SO THE *fiesta* was held under the muzzles of all the guns we could find or borrow, to say naught of a dozen counterfeit pieces which I had constructed from tree trunks and added to the real guns over the main gate; and from time to time, either the captain or myself would take half a company and march through the crowd catacorner,

knocking down any who did not move quickly enow, and otherwise reminding the population that they were but men.

"Now if Guglielmo will but keep out o' sight," says my officer, about four of the afternoon, "we may yet pull through without riots."

But alas, at that very moment came a servant commanding the captain's presence before the duke; and in less than half an hour, I was performing the duty of escorting my lord on a tour of the castle, past hundreds—nay, thousands—of subjects whose chatter had died in their throats at his appearance. Had this been due to terror of him, all would have been well; but on the faces turned toward us I saw no such emotion; merely loathing, which meant also that its object was despised.

"I shall announce the new tax in person," says Guglielmo, to which, of course, I could make none other reply than a salute, much though I felt like groveling on the ground and imploring him to entrust the affair to heralds, or at least post himself, before speaking, on top of the castle wall.

He seemed quite unconscious of the danger surrounding him; he had his back half turned to the mob for the most part and seemed to be admiring the effect of the sunset on the waters of the moat. At last he stopped and beckoned forward an attendant who carried a kind of wooden stool, all gilt and covered in velvet.

"This is the place," says Guglielmo. "I will mount the rostrum. Lieutenant, your shoulder. Ah! Command silence."

I roared, and furthermore told six of my soldiers to place themselves between Guglielmo and the front rank of his listeners, these last having previously been pushed back with halberds some fifty feet from the stool. God, how I prayed that the captain would sense something out of the ordinary and send me another half company!

From every direction, and especially from the row of wine butts (refilled some dozen times that day) stragglers were running to join the rest of the crowd about the duke. Already their impact was causing the front of the mob to waver; and as my halberdiers went forward to thrust it back again, a single voice from the outskirts rose in a drunken howl of:

"*Viva il popolo!* Down with oppression!"

"Loving subjects," says Guglielmo, in his clear, lazy voice. "I trust that ye have well enjoyed the *fiesta* I have been pleased to provide."

"Why not? We paid for it!" yelled another voice; and the crowd tittered.

Guglielmo stood on his stool quite calm and collected, one white hand on a purple Paduan hip.

"Now that ye are gathered together," says he at last, "it pleases me to announce to you a new tax. Hitherto, there hath been an imposition of one soldo on every farm animal. Henceforth this will be of two soldi, and will apply also to every fowl, and to every human being."

For a moment—in fact, for several heart beats, so stunning was this news—the crowd stood gaping, silent. I, breaking into a violent perspiration, sent a man away post haste to demand reinforcements of the captain; and as he departed, I saw that Guglielmo, so far from realizing his peril, had turned about on his stool once more to admire, it seemed, the moat or the wall of the castle.

"Lieutenant," says he, having finished this inspection, "your shoulder again. I would dismount . . ."

SUDDENLY, as though the duke's disappearance from on high had been a signal, the crowd broke into a shriek of fury. Never have I heard the like before or since. Had there been a leader already appointed—even the shadow of one—this would have been moreover the last earthly sound to strike my ears. As it was, the mob milled upon itself, seeking those who should tell it what to do; whereof some dozen arose at various points and began speeches.

One in particular I noted, a tall fellow somewhat of the type of Carlo Bonaventura; and, by what he said, seemingly an admirer of his.

"What is this popinjay in velvet, this white face that can not eat even the pulp of an orange?" screamed this fanatic, while I was instructing my sergeant what to do with him. "Our leader Bonaventura was given into his hands—into his very hands, by traitors; and the prince set himself to break Carlo's spirit. He had promised to drown him in the moat, but he dared not do it. Then he swore to make him work at moving stone, and Carlo defied him—him and his guards and his torturers and his jailers and his—"

"Stab that one," says I to the sergeant.

But before he could move from my side, his attention, and mine, and that, indeed of the whole crowd, was distracted by the sound of a mighty splash. Fearing (so tight stretched were my nerves) even an attack from the moat behind us, I spun around, to find Guglielmo already turned, standing with one hand on hip as before, sucking an orange taken from an attendant's basket and smiling slightly as he regarded the castle wall.

My lord, there was a hole in this wall; a stone, loosened from the bitter hard cement which held it to the other stones, had fallen outward and sunk into the moat; and in the aperture left by its falling, there appeared the head and shoulders of a man. Of course, it was Carlo Bonaventura; bearded and filthy almost out of the likeness of humanity; black and red with fresh and clotted blood; still clutching in one swollen hand the remaining inch of that armorer's file. And when I think of the eyes, half blind from long darkness, with which he blinked at the great crowd before him, my belly quakes, your Lordship; aye, after all these years.

"So thou didst decide," calls Guglielmo in his lazy voice, "to pleasure me in this matter of stonework, Carlo *mio?* That was kind."

I thought I heard a sob from Carlo Bonaventura; it may have been only the movement of some rumble under his bone thin knees as he crept forward in his tunnel; in any event, it was quickly hidden in a long wail that rose from the crowd. Not, be it noted, a howl, or a yell, such as would have made me glad of the reinforcements which at this moment arrived; but a moan of hopelessness and helplessness, the cry of humanity facing something too strong for it.

"It was my conceit that thou wouldst," says Guglielmo, resuming his orange. And then, as a bundle of rags fell from the tunnel's mouth to the water, he added joyously, "And now, by the splendor of God, he hath also carried out my promise that he should drown in the moat. Push him down an he come up again, you halberdier. Lieutenant, I think it is nigh time for dinner."

And so, your Lordship, the new tax was peaceably collected, and never, during the thirty years I served thereafter, was there another rebellion. The duchy grew and prospered; and the Duke Guglielmo died possessed of great wealth, and the captaincy of all the princes thereabouts.

It was on the ground of this temporal prosperity that I presumed to advise your lordship in the matter of the Portarica poll tax.

Of course, there is an hereafter . . .

Merely alluding to the which in passing and without arrogation of the authority to state whether its terrors may or may not offset the fruits to be garnered by resolution in the present life,

I subscribe myself,

Humbly and in kissing your Lordship's hands,

—L. CARADOSSO,
Captain

Continuing

The ROARING HORN

A novel of a condemned windjammer and its shanghaied crew on a thrilling voyage around the world's worst corner

By GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

JASON MELLISH, owner of the condemned windjammer, the *China Girl*, had paid Captain Bohannon a cool twenty thousand dollars to take the decayed old hulk around Cape Horn laden with railroad iron, heavily insured. Captain Bohannon planned to be set ashore somewhere in South America. The loftily sparred ship would go on. The decay of time, the neglect of man—added to these, the rigors of the roaring Horn would destroy the *China Girl* beyond a doubt.

Then would cadaverous old Owner Jason Mellish collect his insurance in New York, search for Roderick Tyson, his nephew, and have something with which to give that young man more of a start as a master in steam. Captain Bohannon would have plenty for his old age. Neither Bohannon nor Mellish worried about the loss of the riffraff, shanghaied crew.

But Mellish did not know, that morning when the *China Girl* left her Staten Island pier, that in the hold was his sister's son, his favorite nephew, for whom he had planned that murderous voyage of the *China Girl*. Out of sheer perversity and cruelty, Bohannon, who hated both Mellish and the nephew, had shanghaied young Tyson. Though Tyson

was the only real sailor aboard, Bohannon abused him; the sailors despised him. He was educated, proud, skillful, quiet.

As luck would have it on such an ominous voyage, the *China Girl* picked up the survivors of a burning yacht—an old man and his daughter. Badly burned, exhausted, the old man died. At once Captain Bohannon and Leadspitter, his mate, went through the suitcase which the two unfortunates had salvaged and brought aboard. In the suitcase was a hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars in English and American banknotes.

They ordered the corpse sewed up at once.

"We'll have to be mighty careful o' the girl," said Bohannon.

"Oh, I guess the pair o' us can handle her," replied Leadspitter.

"Right! Well—fix him up any time now and let's get it done with."

Bohannon withdrew to the dead man's room and cleaned out the pockets of the corpse while Leadspitter, grumbling, summoned Boatswain Saltash.

BOATSWAIN ANTHONY SALTASH drafted Paavola the Finn and Karlstad the Swede for the job of sewing up the body. Both were handy with palm and needle. Though neither liked the task, they resigned themselves stolidly enough to it, such being all in the long day's work.

Under the boatswain's supervision they sewed two old canvas cloths together and for ballast took one large and two small holystones—the prayer books and the Bible that Leadspitter had ordered. As a matter of course they also searched the body, hoping against hope some slight pickings might have been left.

"Nuttin', dough," sighed Karlstad. "Us poor slobs, we don't get nuttin', never!"

Paavola made no comment. Life, for him, was all "nuttin'."

Beginning at the foot, they sewed up the body.

"Take the last stitch troo his nose," directed Saltash, according to ripe sea custom. "If the old bloke's alive, he'll holler. We got to give him his last chance. That's ondly Christian!"

While this work was under way aft the men forward were tense with keen emotion. For all hands, that day, emotions had swarmed in plenty. The rescue of the old man and his daughter; the girl's beauty, obvious enough despite her sad disarray; the very presence of a woman and a corpse aboard, all had furnished food for boundless discussion. A sense of blue ruin impending had begun to burgeon in the minds of many. The death of Humason aloft, long ago, the feminine name of the ship, the saving of life at sea, the arrival of a woman, and the fact that a dead man even now lay in the cabin—all these factors far more than sufficed to prove the *China Girl* as good as lost.

But the rescued woman had wakened worse emotions than dread.

"She ain't no damned old battle ax like us fellers gets in port," the Rock Scorpion declared. "There's a gal as *is* a gal, by the Law Harry!"

"Good to look at, but better wid a pilot to take charge of her," judged Tabry, the wry leg Newfoundlander. "I wouldn't mind overhaulin' a purty little craft de like o' dat, and roundin' her to. Not at ahl!"

"Even so," Chubbock assented. "Purty as water rowed in de moonlight—purty as a trapful o' fish!"

The gunman ventured even a more drastic remark, whereat the negro broadly guffawed. The "chaw round" threatened to pass all bounds.

"Look here, you men," Tyson interposed, quietly but with grim significance. "Clap a stopper on your jaw tackle, now, or there'll be a few faces changed here!"

Two or three had half taken the challenge, but on due consideration had foreborne conflict. Tyson's fist looked hard and his eye cold.

Safer ground had been the suitcase and its contents.

"Wonder what the hell they got in there?" The ex-taxi driver, Antoon, voiced a common curiosity.

"Clothes, likely?" suggested Solomon Moon. "Ship's papers?"

"More 'n dat!" the gunman averred. "Chee, I'll bet it's full o' kale!"

"*Ja, ja,*" from Bielefeld. "Dot's so—money!"

"It's none of our damn' business what it is!" Tyson declared. "Whatever it is, it's theirs, not ours!"

"Who say we say it's ours?" asked Alcaniz, the Spaniard. "*Caramba!* We no make some talk, you butt in?"

"Any God's amint o' money," Stackhouse the Maine man declared. "A power o' money, that's my guess!"

"Same here," Chubbock agreed, holding his pipe oddly between the nipper-like thumb and little finger that now alone remained on his right hand. "I'll bet a farden against a million, it's de rale old cash. By dis reason, me sons, dat was a fine sportin' ship or yacht dey come off of. Dem's full sledged millionaires!"

"And what," asked Stackhouse, "what do folk most gen'ly grab when they abandons ship in a hurry? Money an' the like, ain't it?"

"Gawd, if dat's so—" The gangster's ejaculation ended in a silence more eloquent than many words.

THE APPEARANCE of Boatswain Saltash, with Paavola and Karlstad bearing the swaddled corpse from the cabin door opening upon the main deck, put a period to all discussion. For the tremendous spectacle of a burial at sea, so poignant that it silenced even the hardest of that riffraff scum, was at hand.

The *China Girl*, easily heeled by a fine slant of wind, was droughing along with every sail aloft doing full duty. A pyramid of white the ship seemed, all alone in the immense and flashing circle of the sea. Slants of pitiless sunshine shot the ocean with patches of running glare. A sky of turquoise, blotched by spats of clouds immeasurably high, arched a world that ached with tropic dazzle. Talking under the ship's bows, foam built and crumbled feather white, boiled aft and cradled in a widening wake.

Now appearing on the poop, Bohannon gave the word.

"All ready, boys. Heave ahead with it!" Then, unwillingly enough, he came down the ladder to superintend this grim task.

Sunlight lay upon the deck with blinding glare. Shadows across it slashed black as those of a mezzotint. Karlstad and Paavola, sweating with exertion under that stifle of heat, freighted their canvas swathed burden to a point just abreast the main hatch. There they laid it down.

The foremast hands, all who were awake—and few were sleeping now—mustered in a ragged, gawking huddle near the hatch. Old Humphrey Chubbock loafed at his galley door. The negro's eyes blinked, gleaming in superstitious dread. With a queer, twisted grin, the Dodger, he of gang fame, peered and sucked at a cigaret. The Cockney muttered something beneath his breath.

Now Leadspitter, squinting in the harsh glare, came from the cabin door, out past the water tank; and Peter Mayes followed him, looking sleepy but expectant. Even a burial would break the dull monotony of these latitudes.

Tyson stood at the rail to watch with the others. In dungarees and bareheaded, bewhiskered, sunburned, he seemed no different from the rest. But his eye was scornful as he cast it over the wastrels of the crew; scornful and bitter.

He growled a word of warning:

"Such of you as are smoking, if you want your pipes knocked down your throats after this is over, just keep 'em in your mouths! And harkee, every man that keeps a cap on now is going to have a headache for it later!"

Grumbling, cursing him privily, the offenders none the less hauled off their caps and stowed their pipes. Tyson had already at one time or another argued with a few of them, who still as a result bore bruises or remembered them.

Silence fell, awkward, waiting. The ballasted corpse reposed under a swaying grid of shadows from aloft. Solomon

Moon fetched from the carpenter shop a rough plank to serve as a duck board. On this Paavola and Karlstad adjusted the body, feet toward the rail.

All things now were ready for the final scene.

CHAPTER VI

BURIALS

AT A WORD from Bohannon, Leadspitter returned to the cabin aft. Presently he reappeared with the girl. Out into that flood of yellow light on the stewing deck she came, moving mechanically. Listless, her face a creamy pallor, eyes dark and wide, she appeared hardly to see anything, or sense what impended.

"You want to stand there, miss?" queried Bohannon, gesturing at the sun splashed planks near the after hatch. "Kind of a little ways off from—him?"

She shook her head, and the sun wove brightness into the tangled meshes of her hair.

"No," she answered, her pale lips barely moving. "I want to be as near him as I can, to the end." She came along and stood beside the body. "You'll read the service, Captain?"

"Service? Me?"

"Yes."

Some one snickered. That snicker died at Tyson's ominous glance.

"Sorry, miss, but—we ain't got no book nor Bible," the captain stammered. "Nary one aboard here."

"But you know the service?"

"No, miss, can't say as how I do."

Behind the girl's back, Leadspitter winked at the captain with a grimace intended to be humorous. Bohannon's face darkened.

"Then you'll say a prayer or two?"

She fixed questioning eyes, dark and deep lighted, on the captain's face, scarred, lined with evil passions and harsh batterings of the sea.

"Well, miss, I ain't much of a master hand at prayin', or the like o' that, but I might try."

Bohannon, sensing the mute mockery of officers and foremast hands, alike, began to flush a dull and bricky red. He shifted his weight, coughed, glanced about as if to determine on whom his vengeance should fall, once this tragi-comedy were at an end.

"If you *will* pray, Captain, I'll be very grateful," the girl said simply. "I know what a ship's captain stands for. Law and order and authority—all the finest things of life at sea."

Wistfully questing some grain of consolation in this sad moment when she felt herself so terribly alone, she searched Bohannon's face. The captain reddened still more. Submerged in heavy silence, the two groups confronted each other—after guard and foremast hands. Of the cold cynicism there about them all the girl sensed nothing.

Bohannon sought refuge in matters he better understood.

"Mr. Furlong," he ordered, "back the main tops'l!"

Again a moment's silence. The old ship, heeled well over, was lying to her work across slow rolling turquoise seas that, like a moving plain, extended to empty and sun dazzled horizons. In the bellies of sails aloft the breeze made pleasant little whisperings. Creak and thrum of cordage, rustle of beds of bubbling froth that flashed along the hull, woke solemn music; fit requiem for him whose body now was soon to plumb unsounded deeps.

"Come on, Mr. Furlong!" the captain repeated. "Lively with your main braces!"

As Leadspitter gave this order the watch on deck obeyed, glad of some action to ease the strain. The yards swung round. Slowly the *China Girl* lost way. Soon she was in irons, sails lying aback against her masts, bowing idly to the sea.

The crucial moment now at hand, Bohannon could no longer dodge the difficult issue. But still he temporized, caught on the horns of a most cruel dilemma. One more order remained for him to give—

"Bring the body to the rail!"

Paavola and Karlstad, with Jubal Tabry and Stackhouse, lifted the board with the insentient form upon it, rested it on the rail and stood by for the final command.

The girl, drawing her self-control about her like a garment, breathed deeply. On her face, with the hue and texture of creamy silk, the sun poured down; and as beauty dwells in a pale flower, so it dwelt there. She lifted her chin a little. Liquidly profound, her eyes sought the captain's.

"Just one prayer?" she asked, standing straight as a dart. "You needn't make it long."

"Why—hm—I—" Bohannon mumbled. "Fact is, miss—"

Vainly he cudgeled his wits. Biblical language enough he had, but all set to other uses than those of benediction. Fatuous, helpless, he floundered in bogs of desperate ineptitude. Empty of all inspiration, he threw a glance skyward; but no help descended. And from the ruffians of the crew covertly whispered gibes met his ear.

Abashed, put down as never in his life, he turned to the mate.

"Mr. Furlong, can you bear a hand, in the matter of prayin'?"

"Me, sir? Not whatever, s'help my cod!" Leadspitter roundly affirmed.

Shaking his bare red head, he suppressed a smile. Even had he known a prayer, not now for worlds would he have said it. A rare treat for him, was it not, thus seeing his Old Man in irons like the ship herself?

"We got to con this here man through, some way," Bohannon declared. "Mr. Mayes, how 'bout *you?*"

"Not me, sir! Sure, I ain't prayed in thirty year. Divil a bit of a prayer do I mind now!"

Prayers enough the Irishman knew. But pray before that gang forward? Be ridiculed all the rest of the voyage as a parson, a pulpit thumper? Not he!

"I'll see this old son of a dog in hell first, fryin'," thought Mayes, "afore I'll make myself bran to be picked by any such birds as *them!*"

In profound distress the girl steadied herself against the rail, near the grimly outlined body on its waiting board. She cast a look of anguish at all the faces, curious and mocking faces, that confronted her.

"Isn't there anybody?" she choked. "Not one, who can pray?"

"Why don't you pray yourself, miss?" asked Bohannon.

"No. It must be some one of the ship. Won't anybody help me? Can't anybody say the burial service at sea?"

"I CAN!" sounded a voice—Tyson's. "If you'll let me, I will!"

Tyson stepped forward and touched his forehead.

"Here, you get back there!" snarled Bohannon, fixing pale eyes of malevolence on this object of his special hatred. "You stand clear! Clew up!"

"Captain!" the girl exclaimed. "If this man can pray, let him."

"But, Miss—he—"

The girl beckoned Tyson. Outfronted, Bohannon had to yield. Tyson advanced to the body. Raising his head a little, eyes looking far away at horizons that shimmered blue with heat, he stood a moment bareheaded in the sunshine.

Then with calm and quiet intonations, he began:

> "I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die . . . The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

Pausing a moment, he glanced at the shrouded form, then steadily continued:

> "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God, of His great mercy, to take unto Himself the soul of our brother here departed, we therefore commit his body to the deep, looking for the resurrection of the body when the sea shall give up her dead . . . Amen!"

As the last words died the girl advanced a trembling hand. She laid it a moment

on the canvas; then, with lips that moved in silent goodby, turned inboard.

Bohannon raised a signaling finger.

Karlstad and Stackhouse lifted the head end of the board. Peter Mayes, for all his cynicism, crossed himself. So too did the gunman and two or three others.

Higher, higher rose the end of the board. The body still clung, as if unwilling to quit the world of air and sun and sky, of wind and light and all high, lovely things, which in another moment it must forever leave. Then all at once it started, slid, a burden of death that swooped and plunged into "the immortal and unresting sea".

The splash, a terrible and appalling sound, seemed to fill the whole ship. Swift flung sparkles of spray flew gleaming, higher than the rail. They vanished, absorbed like the dead man back into the vasty mother of all living—Ocean.

In the following stillness, the girl turned toward Tryson.

"Thanks, from my heart," she said, holding out her hand.

Before them all he took it. For a moment they looked steadily each on each.

"It was very beautiful," she said with elemental simplicity. "Where did you learn it?"

"On my own ship, when I was master."

Their joined hands parted. The girl turned back aft. Even while her father, already far beneath, was plunging to unknown sea caves and dark, strange abysses, she made her way, walking blindly, to the cabin.

Bohannon, with a face of bitter malice, eyed Tyson. In the silence, Humphrey Chubbock covertly wiped his eyes on his dish towel at the galley door. The Cockney sniggered. Matches crackled as pipes were relighted. Cigaret smoke arose. A grumble and murmur of voices faintly welled. Dissonant with the solemn moment just ended, the ribald life of the ship began once more to pulsate.

"You damned creepin' Jesus!" sneered the captain, his scar taut. "You snivellin', lick spittlin' parson! Parson, that's what I say. And every decent sailor knows the kind o' luck a parson brings, aboard ship!"

Pivoting on his heel, followed by Leadspitter and Peter Mayes, he stumped aft.

"Get her under way again!" he snarled. "I'll learn *him* to make a monkey out o' me—him, with his psalmin' and his prayin'!"

The rites of death, the burial at sea had ended. These, but not the deeds of life that were, inevitably as the stars' circling of their courses, to spring therefrom.

THAT night, under the brass lamp that slowly swung in its gimbals above the cabin table, the girl told who she was, and whence, and whither bound when disaster had befallen. Across the table from her sat Bohannon and Leadspitter, smoking. With calculant eyes, though perhaps somewhat differing motives, they observed the play of light on her carelessly twisted, blue black hair, the sweet curve of her breast, the dark candor of her eyes. Two human wolves, they watched the victim on whose death both had utterly agreed.

"My name is Raineaux," she explained. "Isora Latour Raineaux. French family, of course, though I was born in New Orleans. My mother's dead. She died when I was only a little tot. My father is—was Jacques Dupré Raineaux."

"That so?" asked Bohannon, veiling the turpitude of his thoughts by an assumed cordiality. "Hmmm, now! You don't mean the big sugar man?" And the captain, pipe in mouth, leaned elbows on the table.

"Yes. Plantations scattered all over Central America and the West Indies. *Centrales*, you know, they call them."

"Sure, that's right. Centrawls. Many a one I've seen! And you was headin' for one of 'em when you burned up?"

"No. Bound from Belize to Marseilles. Partly business and partly pleasure." At the word, her lip faltered. "In the *Viajero*. Our yacht, you know."

"Yes, miss, you told us that name

a'ready. I don't seem to place her," the captain remarked. "Steam or motor?"

"Neither. Father never 'd have a thing to do with them. All his early life he was a seafaring man. Had ships of his own. Canvas was the only thing he had any use for."

She paused, trying to keep back the tears.

"Fine built gal, this," Leadspitter was thinking as he studied her. "I like 'em well rounded on the bows, same as this 'un. These here flapper gals, which their clothes looks worse on 'em than a shirt on a monkey gaff, I got no use for. Gimme a gal with some meat on her bones, says I!"

Isora deserved any man's approval. Now that she had eaten and drunk a little of the ship's best and had recovered a trifle from shock and the first devastations of grief, the natural resilience of her twenty-four years had brought back some tinge of color to her cheeks, some carmine to her lips. Not all of the amiable Leadspitter's thoughts were of money, as fixedly he regarded her.

"So your father liked sail, eh, what?" the captain asked, shooting a smoke arrow.

"Yes. I've made a good many voyages with him. I'm a real sea dog's daughter." She smiled sadly. "I know my navigation pretty well. The ropes, too."

"If you do, miss, this is the first time ever I see a woman as did. How many ropes, now, on a full rigged ship?"

"Seven. Tiller, bell, man, bucket, foot, bolt and leech. But—"

"She *does* know 'em, by Judas Priest!" exclaimed Leadspitter with enthusiasm. "If this ain't a proper marvel!"

"But no matter about that, though. Even after father got into the sugar game and—succeeded, he still clung to sailoring. He built the *Viajero*. Used her for visiting his properties. That took longer than steam or motor. But he'd never have a power yacht. Always seemed afraid of engines."

"So?" the captain asked, his eye on the girl's ruby ring, glowing with sanguine splendor under the lamplight as her hand, sunburned and strong, lay on the table. "'Fraid of 'em, was he? Same here. Give me canvas every time!"

"He was right, too. It was an engine that caused the disaster."

"How's that, miss?" And Bohannon's pale gaze shifted to her features, which the downflung cone from the brass lamp brought into charming relief against the shadows of the cabin beyond. "What happened—if you don't mind tellin'?"

HER FOREHEAD wrinkled slightly, its smoothness vexed by little lines of distress. For a moment she made no reply, but seemed listening to the creak and give of the old ship's timbers, the subdued voices of wind and night and sea all about her. At last she answered:

"Of course, I'll tell you. I'm not a silly, hysterical thing that can't face facts or even think about them. It was our wireless dynamo. It got out of order. Trying to make repairs, our operator set the oil supply afire. It got away from us, the fire did. Wooden built yacht, the *Viajero*. We had to abandon ship. Had three boats."

"What happened the other two, miss?"

"I don't know. There was an argument. They thought the best chance was to make for St. Martin or St. Kitts or some of the northern Leewards. Father was determined on Guadeloupe. He stayed aboard, too, till the last minute, fighting the fire. Nobody could make him leave. Even I couldn't. There was an explosion. The gasoline supply for the wireless blew up, and—"

"So that's how he got his burns?"

"Yes. He didn't realize, at first, how bad they were. Neither did I. After that, of course, we had to abandon ship. I took just one suitcase—the one you saw—with a few things and what money we had. There were some jewels, too. We were taking them to France to be set. It was terrible! I tore up a skirt and bandaged him, but it didn't do much good. You know the rest."

"There now, miss, don't go feelin' bad!" Bohannon tried to admonish soothingly, as the dark eyes swam with tears. "*That* don't do no manner o' good. You're wantin' to make some American port, I reckon?"

"Yes. Can you manage it?"

Bohannon shook his bald head.

"'Fraid not, miss. I'm accommodatin', I am, gen'ally. But that's out o' reason. This here ship's bound for Valparaiso with a cargo o' railroad iron."

"Valparaiso? But that—that's around the Horn!"

The captain nodded.

"That's awful!" exclaimed Isora. "Isn't there any way for me to get word to anybody for weeks?"

"No, miss. Weeks is what it'll be, and a good many of 'em, at that, by jolly! It's March now. We might heave our hook in Valparaiso harbor some time in June or July—if we have luck."

"Oh, if you only had wireless! But of course—" she paused, thinking.

Nervously her strong brown fingers wrinkled up the green cloth on the table, pressing it into little folds.

"I—I've got to be reasonable. I'll try to be. I know too much of ships and schedules to ask you to shift your course and set me ashore somewhere. Even though I can pay for it, and pay well, I won't ask that."

"I'm glad you won't, miss," Bohannon stoutly asserted, with an air of entire incorruptibility. " 'Cause it wouldn't do no good, would it, Mr. Furlong?"

"None whatsomever!" that worthy declared, equally robust in his devotion to the owner's interests. "Can't be did!"

"But," added the captain, tamping down ashes in his pipe, "if you can put up with our rough grub and ways—"

"Oh, those are the least of my troubles, Captain. I'm at home on anything that sails. And I'd trust myself anywhere in the world with men like you two." Her eyes were level full of frank and amicable confidence. "There's something about sailors so different from landsmen. I always feel so perfectly safe with sailors. Real deepwater men—they're too much *men* to be bad, really."

"I'm dogfired glad you feel that way, miss," put in Leadspitter, "'cause that's what we all are, aft—real deepwater men. An' by the Judas Priest, you can bet on that. Bet on it to the limit, an' then some!"

A PAUSE followed, while smoke coiled blue writhing in the superheated air of the cabin, under the lampshine. Leadspitter narrowly regarded Isora.

"Purty as a sunset at sea!" he was thinking. "I never laid my lamps on a better modeled little craft. *She* ain't none o' your tiptoe Nancies, but a real live female. I cert'nly cotton to the cut o' her jib!" And then, for his mental machinery worked ponderously, "Figgerhead an' bows, she's perfect. Smart as paint, that's what. I'd give a lot to cruise in an' fetch moorin's alongside her—get a line on her an' tow her to port, I would, so!"

Two bells of the first night watch harshly clanked. On the deck above sounded footfalls as Peter Mayes walked the poop.

"Only one thing, though," remarked Bohannon, as on a sudden thought. "You say you got some money and jools in that there dunnage o' yours?"

"Yes, why?"

"Well, miss," he seemed to hesitate, "if I was you, dogged if I wouldn't put 'em in the ship's safe."

"In the safe!" she breathed wonderingly. "What for?"

Her eyes, full of questioning, seemed starred with tiny lights from the lamp; lights that swam and glinted in their dark profundities.

"I ain't wantin' to worry you none, miss," Bohannon confided, "but to be fore and aft with you, we got an awful gang o' hard cases, forrard. By the salt sea, yes! If you got anythin' much in the way o' valuables, and they wasn't locked up—and if the crew was to know it—"

"We might have trouble?" she asked, a little anxious line drawing between her

level brows. "Is that what you mean?"

The captain made a gesture of assent.

"Might," he laconically answered. "Tell you what, miss, you take an honest old sea dog's fatherly advice." Covertly Leadspitter grinned, but Isora was looking only at the captain and saw it not. "You make up a bundle of everythin' you're uncommon choice of, savvy? I'll lock it in the ship's safe. If I don't, I'm mortal afraid of a shindy or somethin'. O' course," he added, "I'll give you a receipt for it, unsight unseen."

"As if I needed any receipt from a man like you!" She vaguely smiled. "All right. That might be better, to lock my things up. But no receipt, of course."

"Very well, miss, suit yourself," the captain agreed, while Leadspitter's eye narrowed. "You can do it any time you like, see? Tomorrow or next day—any time. Tell you what—" and his tone grew more confidential. His hand, tattooed with the blue foul anchor, extended itself toward her over the table. "I wouldn't ask it, by jolly, only for one man. The rest of 'em don't worry me much. Bad enough, some of 'em, but got no brains. Half of 'em is raynicks that thinks the cook lights his fire with splinters chopped off the ship's log. There's one, though—one, as has got brains and don't care how he uses 'em. That there son of a sea cook, we got to watch *him*, sharp. Keep a weather eye lifted all the time, you can bet and risk it!"

"And which one is that?"

"Well, I don't know as I care to name him. But he's gallows bad, from clew to earring."

"You get him sulked, a little bit dirty," put in Leadspitter, "an' I guess you'd *think* he was bad!"

"He's the spittin' image of a fellow wanted for murder in Boston," the captain continued. "The murder of a woman. I can't take my davy he's the same man, but I'd nigh hand to gamble on it. When we make Valpariso I'm goin' to give him up to the port authorities, that's a fact. Oh, he's full to the gunnels with the devil's own badness, that 'un is. And what makes it worse, a damn'—excuse me, miss—a daggoned sight worse, is his bein' such a hypocrite, in a manner of speakin'. Ain't it now, Mr. Furlong?"

"I don't see how you can figger it no other way," the mate affirmed. "A man like that, as 'll pray, you might expect anythin' of him."

The girl's quick glance encompassed both officers.

"You don't mean?" she asked. "Not that one?"

"I rather not talk about him, if you don't mind," the captain answered. "Tell us about some o' your sugar plantations, or the like o' that."

"But I *want* to talk about him!" she insisted. "He did me a very wonderful service. And he doesn't look like a bad character at all. Rough, of course, like any foremast hand, but—"

"Ah, that's the dangerous part o' that there 'un!" Bohannon reluctantly admitted, as if animadversions were most painful to him. "He looks tee-totally different from what he really is. That's what makes him so uncommon dangerous, and you can lay to that solid!"

As if bemused, Isora sat looking at her firm, brown hands, crossed there on the table before her. She seemed studying her pigeon's blood ruby ring. The captain caught Leadspitter's glance, and passed a cold, meaningful wink. Another burial was in progress now; the burial of a man's reputation, in depths even blacker than those of the sea.

"But he said that prayer beautifully," murmured the girl. "Said it with real feeling."

"There's some as could whistle to a funeral, miss, with real feelin', too. I reckon," declared the captain. "that would of been all one to him, prayin' or whistlin'."

"And he told me," she added with a sorry little smile, "he'd been captain of some ship or other, himself."

"Yes, I reckon he's went cap'n a time or two," admitted Leadspitter. "There's ship owners as 'll take 'most any kind. He's got eddycation, no denyin' it.

Them 's sometimes the worst sort, by Judas Priest! Them eddycated 'uns."

"He's a little of everythin'," Bohannon added. "Navigator, doctor—I don't know what all."

"What," asked the girl, "what brought him down in the world?"

"Ah, that I won't say," the captain denied her, with sly acuteness. "I don't know as I'd care to go into that, with a lady. Same old story, I reckon, It ain't a pretty one, neither. Wine, women and song, as the feller says."

"But I reckon," chimed in the mate, "as how singin' was the little end of it, whittled off fine."

"Just now," Bohannon remarked, "he's claimin' to be the nephy, or somethin', of this here ship's owner. Wherever you find that feller, you'll find trouble."

"What's his name?"

"Blowed if I know, miss! He claims it's Rod'rick Tyson, or the like o' that. He's signed on, though, as John Smith. Says we shanghaied him. Well—" and Bohannon scratched his bushy gray brow with an air of honest admission— "if doin' a man the service to save him from the police by takin' him aboard when he's dead to the world with booze and dope—if that's shanghai'n' him, I reckon mebbe we did. But he'd ought to be thankful he's here, 'stead of in jail with the 'lectric chair waitin' for him, and the like o' that. By Godfrey diamonds, yes!"

Isora gave an odd little smile, and glanced up with a quaver of breath.

"Let's talk about something else?"

"Yes, miss, I reckon that would be better," the captain agreed. "Now, f'rinstance, if you was to tell us somethin' about your sugar plantations . . ."

CHAPTER VII

TIGHTENING SNARE

THREE weeks later the old *China Girl* had crossed the doldrum belt of daily showers, of baffling breezes and of calms that for days on end had sometimes left her like a painted ship hanging on a wall, under a pitiless and brain addling bombardment of vertical sunlight. She had won clear of the vast patches of sun cooked, rusty seaweed that, drifting from the Sargasso Sea, had tangled about her rudder post and helped to hold her like a scorched chip on an ocean of hell.

Now she was bowling along south by west, far below the Line and in the latitude of Santos; that is to say, just at the Tropic of Capricorn. The wind for some time had blown a steady Trade, so that for days on end the ship had only aired along in her soft weather suit of summer canvas, the crew hardly touching tack, sheet or brace. Merely a swig or two with the handy billy in the second dog watch had usually sufficed to restore any slack caused by the stretching of topsail and topgallant halyards. So far as working ship was concerned, the crew had latterly found little to complain of. Occasional subtropical rains, too, had refreshed them, filled the water tanks, given the men plenty of wash water for bodies and clothes, and relieved the heat, still betimes oppressive.

Bad grub, however, still formed the theme of the chorus of discontent. Justly, too. For the hardtack had become so weevily that when pulverized the pieces would crawl away. Some of the men had begun to develop sores and prickly heat. Morose and peevish, often unable to sleep through the slow droning nights, not a few had muttered rebellious threats. Thus the spirit of mutiny had gathered headway.

Loose talk about the girl, her ruby ring and her suitcase had made Tyson close a few ugly mouths with a still uglier fist. One night, a little below the latitude of Cape St. Roque, Tyson had come off watch just in time to hear the Rock Scorpion remark:

"Ah, boys, there's the finest little brig as ever stood out to sea! A fine, smart, rollickin' little one, I'm tellin' ye. I'd like to bear down an' take her in tow. Heave 'longside, an' play sweet. By the powers, yes!"

Sam Broadfoot's guffaw had made the forecastle echo. Two or three others had joined in.

"She's the craft for me, all righto," the Scorpion had continued, unaware of Tyson's ominous looming at the door. "*She* ain't no tough old battle ax, boys, though you can see with one slew o' your eye she'd be a little catfire if ever she got started!" Swinging lanternlight on hard, evil lined faces wherein greed and lust were mingled, made of the Scorpion's audience a jackal group. "She's got a look as could warm the heart of a squid, now! A pretty brig, but too damn' much headway. What she needs is a man to handle her, an' I'm just her size. She's the one for me!"

And he began to sing, in a croaking voice like a raven's:

"You can lay her on a tack,
Like a cutter or a smack,
You can roll her from the lee unto the weather!
Just steer her full an' by,
As close as she will lie,
You can bet—"

"Come outside!" Tyson suddenly interrupted this dithyrambic eulogy, this sea song doubtless centuries old. "Come out o' there, you scut, where there's room enough to knock you as far as you're going to get knocked!"

"Hello, parson!" the Rock Scorpion gibed. "That you, eh?"

"Yes, that's me! You heard what I said, didn't you? Come out o' that, now, till I knock your face down your throat!"

"Listen at the man, now!" mocked the Scorpion. "Man, did I say? No, damn it, parson! Talkin' about knockin', is he? Well, who the hell's goin' to do that same?"

For all answer, Tyson jumped in, hauled the Scorpion out and after something of a set to—for the Scorpion was no slouch with his fists—had landed him unconscious with his bullet head under the forward fiferail.

THAT had put an end to discussions of the girl in Tyson's presence; but it had vastly intensified the hatred felt by the wastrels of the crew against him.

Added to his aloofness, his outspoken scorn of farmers who knew not the difference between a handspike and a belaying pin, and to memories of his preposterous claim of being the owner's nephew—though since that first day he had spoken no further word of this, now his attempt at curbing their evil tongues when the girl was in question, envenomed them beyond all measure.

Parson, preacher, Jonah, had all come to be applied to him. Firmly established in the black books of the ruffians, he had heard dark hints regarding the ease wherewith any undesirable could be given a sea toss some fine dark night. The seasoned shells — Newfoundlanders, Frenchman, Scandinavians, the Finn and the German—gave him support. But the hand of every other now was grimly against him.

Little he heeded that. Steadily he carried on, did his work alow and aloft or at the wheel as only a deepwaterman could, held his tongue and bided his time. With the girl he had no further speech. Though once in a way she gave him a swift and covert glance, from aft, she for the most part hardly appeared even to see him. For all the notice she bestowed on Tyson, he might have been so much thin air.

As the old ship tooled away, piling up south latitude with ever vanishing trails of foam that seemed to lag northward, the passage lengthened with hardly more than routine incidents. Under leaden heat or again with freshening breezes the tall square rigger made way toward the waiting Horn. Her bulging canvas now arose toward a sky piled with snowy cloud billowings, now toward gleaming stabs of star-cressets in night vaults of lustrous black. Betimes a sail was reported on horizons of far and glowing vapors again, a steamer's smoke that drifted against a sunset where day perished in gold and liquid crimson flares. Toward the first of April a stiffish gale out of the "sou'-sou'-east" lasted a couple of days and gave all hands employment. The railroad iron cargo racked the *China Girl* a little, as old Jason Mellish had foreseen. Seams

opened a trifle, but did no serious damage —nothing that, to all appearances, a little pumping would not remedy.

But, being set at the pumps, the slacker crowd grumbled all the more. And trouble, already abrew, simmered with uglier bobbling under the surface of only normal discontent.

In like guise does a weak and old boiler, with no safety valve, gather pressure.

SO FAR as the girl Isora was concerned, she had as yet introduced no seriously disturbing factors. As well as any woman could, she had adjusted herself to the life of the ship; had tried to help in every way and in no way to hinder. She had chimed well with the after guard, asked few questions, demanded no attention. A true sea dog's daughter, versed in all the moods and tenses of the ocean, she had readily adjusted herself, as the old *China Girl* had with varying wind and weather gone coursing into the south.

More, she had made herself useful. Bohannon's trashy novels had not appealed to her. Instead, she had bent the dark seriousness of her eyes over "Bowditch's Practical Navigator", the various nautical tables and the sailing directions for the South Atlantic. Presently she had begun looking up tables for Bohannon. That she knew more of log sines and cosines than he did himself was pretty obvious, for often he began leaving the final calculations to her; and several times he asked her to take the morning and afternoon sights for him.

"That there ain't no ornery female, Mr. Furlong," he one day privily admitted to Leadspitter. "She ain't much bigger 'n a pint o' cider, that's a fact, but by jolly her forepeak 's full o' brains. She's the smartest little craft as ever crossed my hawse! Smart as paint!"

"I daresay," the mate replied, glad of a dig at the Old Man, "you could make her sailin' master o' the ship an' she'd navigate better than—"

"Than what? You don't mean me?"

"Oh, no, sir. Than most, that's all."

Bohannon's eye was cold and pale as he scrutinized Leadspitter. But the mate only smilingly reaffirmed—

"Than most, sir, that's all I'm sayin'."

Certain ameliorations commenced to manifest themselves, aft. The captain began making old Abey Buzzard wash the tablecloth and napkins and tidy up the cabin a little; in which tidying process Isora quietly helped. Knives and forks came into more common use, threatening to displace fingers altogether. Language grew moderated and razors more busy. The captain's stockish figure straightened a little and he even started changing his shirt twice a week. Tobacco juice no longer maculated his chin. As a supreme concession to the eternal feminine, he furtively adopted the use of a bandanna, likewise to replace fingers.

"Damn' 'f I like it!" Leadspitter growled. "We're gettin' too hell fired tony, altogether. I like things nice an' tidy, as good as the next man, but, by Judas Priest, there's limits!"

"What d'you mean, limits?" the captain demanded.

"So much swell style now," deprecated Leadspitter, with unusual petulance. "If we got to act like we was a passenger liner, sir, I ain't over an' above stuck on it. I'll swaller the anchor stock if I am, now!"

"Stow that talk!" Bohannon riposted. "I'm ridin' this 'un, I am, and by the lovely logline if you ain't civilized, *I* am! What's more, I ain't goin' to be crowded to looward by no mate, and you can lay to that solid!"

Whereupon Leadspitter had duly subsided, but had taken out his choler on poor old Abey Buzzard, giving the steward many a tongue banging for his somnolent habits and his modest, small attempts at style.

Barring this disaffection, however, all aft went peacefully. And despite Leadspitter's grumbling, his eye of calculant desire often rested on Isora. Limited as the girl's wardrobe was, for now since her valuables had been stowed in the ship's safe her clothes hardly half filled the suitcase, by certain magic she made shift to

keep herself reasonably fresh and feminine.

On cooler days, as the ship made ever more southing, she wore a peaked cap and a pea jacket lent her by Peter Mayes; he being the only man aft small enough so that his things would at all fit her. Even in this rigout the girl made an attractive and debonair figure. Well featured, fair, with something of the boyishness of a sea going Rosalind, she lent a welcome touch of color to the dingy old skysail yarder.

Her bright eyes eager for any sight that might befall, her dark hair wind blown under Peter Mayes' cap, hands in pockets, she often paced the deck with one or another of the officers. Unobtrusive, interested, patient, philosophical, she tried to forget the past, bravely to confront the future. Did she mourn her father, did she worry because of inability to communicate with the world, she kept all this to her own heart. No complaint ever escaped her; no look or word save of gratitude, faith, trust in these her rescuers.

Bohannon and Leadspitter—give even the blackest devils their due—treated her with only a sort of rough camaraderie. Fools would they have been, indeed, to have shown anything else; fools, with a matter of a hundred and eighty thousand dollars, aside from the precious stones, to split between them! Peter Mayes, however, oblivious outsider in this plan, a time or two essayed some clumsy advances. But Isora only smiled at him, telling him how safe a woman always felt with real blue water men. This, added to a few pointed remarks from Bohannon, caused the second mate's gallantries to fall slack, his Celtic exuberance to keep within decent bounds.

ON THE whole peace reigned aboard the *China Girl*. But as the ship drew down toward thirty south, external trouble arrived; for a shark picked her up and began persistently following.

"An' by dat," old Chubbock affirmed, "we'm goin' to have a rookery, afore dis v'yage is troo-up." Standing at the rail, he watched the shark's triangular fin slitting the waves. "Dat'm as true as de light, man dear! Some one aburd yere is goin' to die, sure, an' good dat son of a scaldy knows it!"

"Nonsense!" Tyson reproved him with a laugh. "The trouble with you Chubbock, is that most of the things you know aren't so."

"Well, dis yere is so, anyhow," the cook stoutly affirmed, holding his pipe in his nipper hand. "I niver de divil iver knowed it to fail. I'm awful knocked out about dat shark, I am, so," he went on, while others of the crew listened with due respect for his many years and long experience. "Dat shark 'm part o' de jink as is on dis ship; you wait an' see. Fallin' overburd now, dat 'd be worse 'n fallin' in love, an' dat 'm bad enough! De shark, he 'm goin' to keep cozy to we till he get his bellyful o' man meat. I'm wonnerful scarrited o' sharks, I am, so!"

Several declared that human life would have to be sacrificed before the curse could be removed. Two or three asked Bohannon's permission to catch the shark; and though the Old Man grumbled about the damage a shark might do on deck, he unwillingly consented.

Jubal Tabry and Paavola the Finn rigged a hook and baited it with a piece of rancid salt pork. Presently they snatched the shark aboard with a gantline from the foreyardarm, amid profane rejoicings. They dragged him inboard and lowered him with his tail just clear of the deck. Then they got a piece of stout ratline stuff round the formidable tail, and again lowering him, this time to the deck, hauled in on the tail through a deck ringbolt. They pulled his wicked jaws, with the hook, to the forward bitts. The man eater was thus stretched out taut and helpless, impotent to do more than writhe a little. Necessary precaution, for a shark like this one, thrashing on a ship's deck, can easily knock the place to smithereens.

"Lucky fer the coon we got him, by crimus!" remarked the Maine man, Stackhouse. "It was him the shark was arter,

sharks bein' grim death to niggers, fond o' dark meat!"

"Dat so, boss?" Broadfoot queried, going a bit gray, and with widening eyes.

"Sure!" Boston Irish corroborated. "They rather have it, any old time, than chicken. An' faith, don't everybody know how sharks loves chicken?" Then with some detail he proceeded to narrate the way he had once seen a shark cut a negro almost in two in the harbor of Kingston, Jamaica.

"W'at we do wit' de shark, now we got heem?" asked Viterbo, the paper hanger. "Eat heem up?"

"Dat's jus' like a Wop!" the gangster scornfully ejaculated. "Y' don't ketch *me* eatin' no shark!"

They debated fit punishment for the sixteen foot terror of the sea. With a kind of awful fascination they inspected his terrible mouth. Muted to little more than monosyllables, they examined the many rows of gleaming and triangular teeth, each tooth razor edged and corrugated like a Malay *kris*. Lashed securely on deck, the shark regarded his tormentors with pale green eyes, gold flecked. If you have never looked into those unearthly eyes of a shark, you know not what abysmal, stark, elemental killing lust and cruelty really mean. By contrast, the eyes of a tiger are benevolence itself.

Some of the men voted to hack off the shark's tail and spike it to the jibboom end.

"Dat'm bound to make us carry fair winds," Solomon Moon declared. "Nothin' like a shark's tail for dat!"

"An' then 'eave the blighter overboard, again," the Cockney suggested. "Gorblimey, let 'im try to swim an' foller us without no tyle! Old as Adam, 'e is, but 'e's done for now. Cut 'is blinkin' tyle orf an' give 'im a toss!"

And the Cockney, fiddling with his sickly little wisp of a mustache, showed in every meager line of his face wolfish anticipation of the shark's agony.

"Prop his mouth open with a stick o' wood," recommended Stackhouse. "Or bust his upper jaw—bend it up, an' then heave him. Then when he tries fer to swim, he'll stay on top o' the water. Can't git down. He'll starve to death that way."

"Kill him, stick a knife through his backbone, and chuck him overboard," put in Tyson. "What's the sense of torturing the brute?"

"Parson!" some one mocked, and a laugh rose against Tyson.

Most of them strongly favored torture, the more malignant, the better, as usual when sharks are caught. After some debate the Rock Scorpion evolved a novel cruelty.

"Let's cut his liver out, an' see if the beggar 'll still chase us! Eh, what say?"

This brilliant idea found instant favor. Bielefeld and Paavola proceeded to execute it. They promptly dissected the liver from the writhing monster. Then Paavola, ever handy with palm and needle, sewed the shark up again. Half a dozen men triced him up and heaved him over with a tremendous splash. Dazed, convulsed, the shark sank and vanished. Blood tinged the pure emerald of the sea. Jeers and mockery echoed.

"Layve dat son of a one foller we now, if he'm a mind to!" Tabry vociferated. "Mebbe if he'm on de savin' hand, he'll come back fer his liver sometime, ain't it?"

The liver was hung under the break of the forecastle head, with a bucket beneath it to catch the oil drip, there being a firm belief among the more experienced shellbacks that shark's oil was "wonderful for rheumatiz or the like o' that". Amid general satisfaction, they all considered the incident closed.

"Now de jink 'm took off o' we," declared Chubbock. "Now us can lay back an' be azy in our minds. Dat omadaun of a shark, he'm wopped out, sure, an' ahl de bad luck gone *flaus*, to de bottom, along o' he!"

WHAT may be called an era of good feeling possessed the ship for two days after her bad luck had thus summarily been disposed of. The weather held fair, with a cheery sun

beaming from a sky of luminous azure, soft and immensely high. Bowling breezes jogged the *China Girl* along, leaning graciously to the caress of the trades; drove her, breaching like a porpoise, ever into the South that waited.

In better mood, the disaffected ones forgot to grumble at their prog. Off watch, some carved their names on the bunks, played cards, yarned, even begged a few of the Old Man's novels and read a little. Now, if ever, something like content descended on the ship, as if Fate, toying with her, had decreed some peaceful breathing space before harsh blows should fall.

Peace, on the whole, enveloped ship and crew. Peace, in which Captain Isaac Bohannon indulged his gentle fancies; dwelling now on old Jason Mellish's agony, now on the joys of sending Tyson to his death off the roaring Horn, now on his own plans for quitting the ship at Bahia Blanca, but most of all on Isora's money and the neatest way to dispose of Isora's self.

"And if I could fix it some way," he gently pondered, "so I could sheer off from lettin' Mr. Furlong get any o' the swag, that'd be the best part of all. Why couldn't I, eh, what? Why couldn't I? Here now, by crook, is somethin' that's got to be thought out, and shall be. Burn me, yes!"

THUS now was the amiable Bohannon living with a forward eye that perceived the most enjoyable prospects. Only one fly appeared in his ointment, one difficulty not in consonance with the generally happy drift of events. This difficulty, however, seemed sufficiently troublesome.

The captain was considering it one night about a week after the shark had been disposed of.

It being now the first week in April, the *China Girl* found herself around 35° 60′ South, 41° 50′ West, or near the parallel of Montevideo. A starless night, that; black as a wolf's mouth and heavy with clouds whence now or then scats of rain swished across a moderately heavy sea, mingled with spume from the bow as the ship put her nose in a trifle deep. A blustery, inky abyss of night, the wind southeast, and the old vessel under topgallantsails reeling off nine knots on a south southwest course.

Bohannon, whose voluntary custom it was to keep the deck for an hour or so in the first night watch, was stumping the weather side of the poop, hands in pockets and pea jacket buttoned up to his hard chin; for a taste of the tail end of a pampero had brought with it premonitions of cold. As the captain walked and smoked his pipe, he was thinking. Thinking hard.

"Here's kind of a tangle I'm into," his cogitations ran. "Kind of a jam, by crook! I got to look out for squalls, or I'm liable to be caught all aback. There's the money and jools in my safe. Only the gal and Mr. Furlong knows they're there. The gal part of it 's all right, but how about Furlong? That, ah, is the part I've got to bottom out, afore I'll rest easy in my mind!"

He stood pondering in the velvet dark, then walked into the little alley between the deckhouse of the cabin and the wheelhouse aft of it. Down through the skylight he glanced, to see if Leadspitter were about. Decidedly, in this cogitative juncture, he did not want Leadspitter to interrupt him. Leadspitter being invisible below, Bohannon figured the mate must have turned in.

He saw Isora, however, sitting at the cabin table, poring over a volume of nautical tables. Opposite her, smoking, regarding her with an eye of admiration, Peter Mayes kept silence—Mayes, who was to go on watch when the Old Man called him.

Bohannon, glancing at the clock that hung in the skylight well, saw that the time was nearly two bells of the first night watch.

"I'll go below pretty soon," thought he. Mayes would soon be coming on watch. "Go below and try to think this out. It needs some thinkin', by Godfrey diamonds, yes!"

He looked into the wheelhouse, where Paavola stood at the helm, assured himself the *China Girl* was on her course; and once more walked to the weather rail. Something about the feel, the bite of cooler winds, enheartened Bohannon, despite the fact that he felt pensive, dashed, troubled regarding Leadspitter. Those cooler winds meant that, for him, journey's end was drawing nigh. Bahia Blanca was within a few days' sail. The moment fast approaching when . . .

Bohannon stood and brooded in the rain flurried night, arguing the question fore and aft with himself. Filmy sheets of water whispered down the sails, along the blackness of the decks, across which gleamed a feeble light pencil from the galley door. Old Chubbock, working there on the morrow's grub, was rattling now a stove lid, now a hook pot or a pannikin. Bohannon listened abstractedly. His ear was more attuned to the mill race rush of foam along the ship's flank, beneath her counter. Vague white, spume burst and wove and faded. The captain was thinking:

"Anybody down in that, now, hell of a poor show they'd ever have to pull through, eh? Before the gal goes, I wish to God somethin' would happen so that damned Leadspitter 'd go, too!"

Leadspitter! Here lay the captain's problem and his worry. He pondered:

"Leadspitter, he's dodgy, all right. None dodgier than him! He ain't honest, like me. Now, when I say I'll run down a certain course, I'll run it down. But *him*, hell's bells, he's liable, as not, to double cross!

"What's to hinder him," the captain's thought ran along, "hinder him crackin' me over the cabeza some dark night and givin' me the high dive? Then he could settle with the gal, and it'd be plain sailin' for him to grab all the money and stuff for himself! Though much good it 'd do him," he realized with spiteful malice, "if ever he tried to take this 'un round the Horn."

Still, the Old Man decided, he would have to keep a weather eye lifting for Leadspitter. Never must the mate get the wind of him. Nothing could be more unwise than to risk being on deck at night with that menace, if away from observation by the man at the wheel.

"I'll take care of that part, all righto," the captain concluded, a bull necked, grim, dour figure in the rain lashed night. "But there's worse, and more of it. By the salt sea, yes! Pretty soon I've got to give out as how we're needin' repairs, stores or somethin'; shift my course and bear away for Bahia Blanca. When Leadspitter sees that, what then?

"Why, then, he'll be all for heavin' the gal overside, hand runnin'. But, as I got this forelaid now, I don't *want* her hove over. If she is, Leadspitter 'll have one grand blackmailin' hold on me. I'll be all in a clove hitch. He might come aginst me strong at Bahia. 'Course, I'd have a hold on him, too, but that ain't the p'int. The p'int is, I don't want no rookus nor nothin'. I want everythin' all nice and quiet and appliable. I can fix this thing slick as grease, not run in no danger, *and* get all the cash and jools for my lone hand—if I can only fetch that there gal safe and sound to Bahia Blanca, arfter all. And nothin' stands aginst my doin' it but just Leadspitter—God stiffen him!"

FROM the carpenter shop issued a strain of song, to the accompaniment of the tubercular accordion played by Noah Landerry, the herring choker.

Surly, brooding, Bohannon gave impatient ear:

"Oh, who's been here since I been gone?
Stiddy up a jig, an' a hog eye!
Some big black nigger with his sea boots on!
Stiddy up a jig, an' a hog eye!
A hog eye, an' a hog eye, stiddy up a jig an' a hog eye,
Stiddy up a jig, an' all she wants
Is her hog eyed man!

"The hog eye man is the man for me,
Stiddy up a jig, an' a hog eye!
He brung me down from Tennessee,
Stiddy up a jig, an' a hog eye!
A hog eye, an' a hog eye, stiddy up a jig an' a hog eye,
Stiddy up a jig, an' all she wants
Is her hog eyed man!"

As the song continued, ever on a livelier tempo and with increasing racket of slapped hands, stamped feet, Bohannon cursed bitterly.

"Them turnpikers, them road beaters, them pea soup swillin' sons o' scuts," he growled, "amusin' 'emselves without a thought in the world, and me thinkin' my head off to outsail that skunk of a Leadspitter afore he outsails *me!*"

One reflection, however, brought him a moment's relief, set his grim gash of a mouth smiling in the windswept dark. He brooded on how, fearing lest the mate might take a long chance and ravage the safe by some hook or crook, he, Bohannon, had removed therefrom the twenty thousand that old Jason had given him; had hidden it in his desk drawer, now a far safer place than the ship's repository.

"I reckon I can outsail Leadspitter, if it comes to that," he pondered, chewing his pipestem. "Reckon that son of a whelp ain't goin' to get to wind'ard o' me!"

The captain saw ways, indeed, to reap far more by playing a lone hand game than by letting the mate in on it. Ways! His brain moved slowly, but it moved. Prodigiously better was the new plan he had evolved, the plan of keeping the girl alive, of getting her safe ashore.

That must, at all hazards, be done! Isora, her cash, bonds, gems, must all be landed at Bahia Blanca. And what then?

Then, ah—the captain's jaw tightened. He clenched his hands in his pockets. He knew Bahia Blanca as well as he knew either one of those hands. Knew the scarcity of shipping there, bound for the States. That would mean a long delay, weeks maybe. Delay, during which the girl would have to stay in the little Argentine seaport.

He pondered how Isora would depend on him at Bahia, take his advice, trust in him. She would, of course, go to the Hotel de Madrid, overlooking the Plaza del Cinco de Marzo. The proprietor of that hotel, where no questions were ever asked, was an old time friend of his. Esteban Montijo, his name was—

"And so crooked, by God," the captain pondered, "he can't even lay straight in bed!"

Two mightily comforting thoughts cheered Bohannon. First, did any of the *China Girl's* wastrels desert at Bahia Blanca, it would be easy to get plenty to replace them. The passage round the Horn could be—would be—continued. And second, after the old ship was gone, leaving Isora and her treasures with the captain . . .

"I'll tend to that part," Bohannon grimly assured himself. "In a port where you can hire a throat cut for five pesos, I reckon there won't be much trouble disposin' of *her!* Once I can land her ashore, the rest 'll be plain sailin', by jolly. I'll fix the cable operator so there won't be no messages sent, about her. It may cost a bit o' jack, but it'll be an A-1 bargain, at that. The gal, she'll be sunk without a trace. It's *too* easy, that's what it is! Too damn' easy, in a manner o' speakin'.

"All but one thing—Leadspitter! How the hell's hinges am I goin' to get her ashore, and away from that son of sea cook, that's what I'd like to know!"

How, indeed?

Only one possible answer offered itself. Eagerly Bohannon embraced that answer—

"It's over the side for Leadspitter, by crook, afore I up helm and shift course for Bahia!"

With which eminently practical and efficient decision the captain blew a mighty cloud of tobacco smoke, smiled to himself, and felt that there was balm and lots of it in Gilead.

CHAPTER VIII

TYSON COMES AFT

AT THIS moment Leadspitter's rating as an insurance risk dwindled practically to zero—or would have dwindled, save for a flaw in the rotten old mizzen topsail tie, seventy feet and more above the captain's ruseful head.

Mizzen topsail tie and head established contacts in this wise. The *China Girl*

was sailing by the wind, and Bohannon walked aft to have a look at the binnacle. Something in the trim of the canvas made him half suspect Paavola had run the ship a point or two off. But in this he was mistaken. He found the helmsman on his course to a dot. This grouched the captain a little. He had expected to reprimand the Finn, and now found it impossible. An opportunity like that, once lost, might never return.

Sour tempered, Bohannon came out of the house again. Immediately events swung in swift and revolutionary change. For as he issued on the port side, he advanced diagonally forward by the corner of the low built house topping the below decks cabin. He got no farther. On this instant the weakened links of the chain mizzen topsail tie carried away. That spelled the end, for Bohannon.

Down in a thunderous crash whirled a raffle of gear from aloft, down on the poop deck—chain, wire, metal and wood blocks. With trip hammer force some part of this sprangling projectile struck the captain's bald head, protected only by the one cloth thickness of his cap.

Black though the night was, with ebony shadows hiding all details, Paavola saw something, sensed what had happened. The smash startled even his icy Finnish soul, but he held firm at the wheel. Bohannon, meantime, had collapsed, plunged to the deck, pole axed, with a broken skull.

Under the litter Bohannon sprawled; his huge bulk sagging to and fro between deckhouse and rail, as the *China Girl* rolled. And more than gear had fallen; more, even, than the captain. An epochal fall, that! For now that oblivion had enwrapped Bohannon—unless he should right soon recover—with him had fallen all plan of the ship putting in at Bahia Blanca.

With him had fallen any chance of Isora reaching land; any possibility of her avoiding that fatal passage round the Horn. Isora, Tyson, officers and crew, Bohannon's own self, ship and all—what could save them now?

On such trivial chances, a foot, an inch to right or left, hang destinies of human lives.

As the wind shakes the luff of a sail, so fear now shook the heart of Paavola. But he did not abandon the helm, nor run to see what damage had been done. Though the very heavens drop and all the stars be dashed to pieces on a ship's deck, the helmsman must hold on. His post is unabandonable, inviolable. Not even the most raging bucko dare strike a man at the wheel; nor must that man desert, so long as the ship swims. At all hazards the helm must be manned, even as the Roman centurion held his place at Pompeii, while falling ashes buried him.

But Paavola could summon help. And this he did by violent and continued ringing of the bell. His alarm was unneeded. At the crash already the ship had wakened to knowledge of something amiss.

Forward, from deckhouse and forecastle, men came crowding out to join the watch on duty. Questions, oaths, broken words drifting downwind, blent in confusion. Below in the cabin, all was activity. As the girl started up, Peter Mayes jammed his cap on and started for the door. Leadspitter's own door was jerked open. The mate, tousled, sleepy eyed and with red hair rucked up, demanded—

"What the devil an' all is that, now?"

"Blow me if I know, sir," Mayes answered. "Somethin's fell from aloft."

"Good thing it didn't happen while one of us was on watch!" Leadspitter growled. "He'd of said we done it a purpose. Good thing the Old Man took it in his head to stand a bit of watch tonight, just for the fun of it, by Judas Priest! That lets us out!"

Talking, they jostled out, and in a whipping rain scrambled to the poop.

"What the hell's all this?" the mate cried, stumbling over litter. Despite the gloom, he vaguely saw confusion. "Here, let's have a lantern here!" Loudly he bawled to Saltash for a lantern; one came bobbing, flickering aft along the drenched deck.

"IT'S DE Old Man, sir!" sounded Paavola's voice from the wheel. "He get hurt, bad. Mizzen topsail yard adrif', sir—gear come down, hit him!"

"The devil you say. Where is he?"

"Layin' nigh de cabin companion!"

They found Bohannon, a crumpled heap under blocks, chains, wire and other débris. Men crowded the poop; lanterns swung and gleamed.

"God's sake!" ejaculated Leadspitter, kneeling, shaking the captain. "You hurt, sir? Hurt bad?"

No answer from the injured man.

"Sure, he's hurt bad!" Peter Mayes declared. "Jumpin' Jupiter, look at all that blood on his face! Killed, entirely, I'm thinkin'. If he ain't slipped his wind a'ready, he will, damn soon!"

"Dead 's a herrin'!" some one commented. "*He's* been sent acrost where the sweet oranges grow!"

"Stow that!" Leadspitter commanded. "Two o' you lubbers, here—bear a hand to carry him below. Look alive, now, 'fore I fist you one on the lug!"

Amid confusion of question and answer, oaths, exclamations, the shuffling of feet on drenched deck planks, they boggled that huge form down into the cabin, laid him on the table, under the lampshine. On that very table Bohannon now was stretched, stertorously breathing, where he had aforetime regarded Isora's dying father.

Mayes, on deck, at once began to clean up the raffle. Mizzen topgallant royal yards were lowered and the sails furled, while Saltash started to clear away the ruptured topsail tie and reeve a preventer.

Down in the cabin—

"Pretty badly hurt," judged Isora. "This looks serious."

"Serious is what it is, miss," Leadspitter agreed. "Here, you—" to old Abey Buzzard— "get a pillar an' put it under his head. Shake a leg there!"

"He's lost the number of his mess, all right," murmured Abey, as he started obeying. "Taken aback, the Old Man is, gone to looard, entire!"

"What happened?" Isora asked.

"Gear aloft carried away," explained the mate. "It come down an' hit him. That's what you get with a damned old rotten slut of a ship like this 'un—beggin' your pardon, excuse my French! Here's another one we got to give the dead launch to, pretty soon, or I miss my guess. If the Old Man ain't bound for another port, I never see a man as was!"

Bohannon, to speak truly, seemed already in the very article of death. Ugly at his best, now crushed and bloodied, he made a spectacle startlingly repellent. But Isora did not recoil.

"There's maybe a chance for him to pull through," she said hopefully. "First thing to do, we've got to find out just how badly he's hurt." Bending, she examined the injury. Silenced, a little awed, the mate, steward and the two or three others who had carried the stricken man below, stood by and watched her, deferring to her greater knowledge.

"Pretty bad, miss?" Leadspitter queried.

"Fracture of the skull, I should say. What a thing to happen!"

"An' no doctor aboard!" the mate exclaimed. "Judas! Ain't this a divil of a mess, now? Know anythin' about this here kind o' thing, miss?"

"Well, something. I've done a little medical work at some of our *centrales*. I'll do all I can, now. Get me some towels and hot water."

The girl's dark eyes were studious in the shadow of her hair as she scrutinized Bohannon. Leadspitter ordered:

"Stewart, hot water an' towels, here!" Then to the others, "All right, you fellers. You can go forrard now."

As the cabin cleared somewhat, it seemed as if the whole scene were shifting. A new phase, a new act of the play was coming on. All the factors had swiftly altered by what some philosopher has called "one of those sudden and strange dissolvings by which Fate so often ends some tremendous period".

Nervously inept, old Abey brought what was needed, slopping a good deal of

water on the cabin floor. Isora washed the wound, tentatively fingering the Old Man's skull. Under her touch, firm and untrembling, the bone ominously yielded.

"Head stove in, miss?" asked Leadspitter.

She nodded.

"Fractured, yes."

"An' by that, he may kick off?" Leadspitter asked. "It's a complete washout for him?"

"Can't say. Probably."

"Dog luck!" growled the mate. "A hell of a thing—excuse me, miss—a proper awful thing to happen, ain't it, now? With us bound round the Horn!"

Leadspitter, half dazed, surveyed the reddened towels, the blood stained water in the basin, the crimson ooze spreading down the captain's forehead and sullenly staining the pillow. Creak and give of the rolling ship mingled with thoughts as yet only half formed in his slow mind, with blurred vistas of possibilities strange and dazzling.

A moment he pondered, while Isora went on with her work. Then into his eyes glinted a tiny and evil flame, kindled there by new, sinister realizations.

"If the Old Man pegs out, and if I work it right, then—why, then, by God, the whole bundle 's mine!"

A SURGE of poisonous exultation welled up in the mate's soul. He shivered a little, shaken with lusts of greed. Oh, golden opportunity now fallen to his hand! His voice trembled a bit with scant concealed eagerness as he stammered—

"The Old Man—he—he's goin' to die?"

"I can't say."

"But it looks like he was done for, don't it?"

"We won't even think of that, or admit it," returned Isora. "We'll do our best for him. One thing, we've got to get him to the nearest port right away."

"Port, miss?"

"Bahia Blanca, yes. That's nearest."

"What—what d'ye mean?" And Leadspitter's face darkened, grew uglier than ever, scarred cheek and all, under the gleam of the swinging lamp. "What d'ye mean by that now?"

"Mean? Just what I say, of course! We've got to get this man ashore as quick as we can, so he can have medical attention!"

Blank silence followed this. Peter Mayes, however, nodded assent. Not so, Leadspitter. He was now thinking more swiftly, his mental machinery oiled and driven by imperative necessity.

"Bahia Blanca?" he cogitated. "No! It's round the Horn, for him! If he dies at sea, then over with the gal, too, and the stuff 's all mine! But if ever Bohannon makes port and happens to get well, he'll know about it. Sometime he'll come against me, shake me down. No Bahia Blanca for *him!*"

"Well," Isora demanded. "How long will it take to make Bahia?"

"We ain't goin' to Bahia," returned the mate. "No, miss!"

"We're *not?*"

"Not whatsomever! Not by the lovely logline, we ain't!"

"But — but common humanity demands it!"

Leadspitter shrugged.

"The moral law—"

"Common humanity or whatever you say may demand it, Miss, but there's other things got to be figgered on. There's things longer 'n the moral law, let me tell *you!*" Defiantly he faced her, across the table where lay the broken captain. "Them things you're talkin' about, they don't count at sea. Not heedin' 'em ain't no soup out o' *my* plate There's other things at sea goes far ahead o' them."

"What things?"

"Carryin' out orders, savvy? That's all as counts, now. We got our cargo an' our orders, ain't we? You know the old sayin'—obey orders even if you break owners! No matter, life or death, orders has got to be carried out! I'm master here, now!"

The girl with suspended breath confronted him, her fists tightening. Be-

tween her and this man the issue was joined, harsh as a Greek tragedy. Leadspitter was first to speak:

"Orders can't be neglected, not for no one man—no, nor half a dozen men, neither. The old *China Gal*, she's got to keep on pushin' the suds, spite o' death an' destruction. Spite o' hell! Round the Horn, or to Davy Jones—that's where she's goin', by gumbo!"

"Of all the barbarous inhumanity!" she flung at him. Her face had paled now; cold fires burned in the darkness of her eyes. "I'll report all this when we make Valparaiso. It may go hard with you!"

"Sorry, miss," Leadspitter still tried to control his rising anger. No man he, to endure long opposition. "Sorry, but orders is orders!"

"You, mate of this ship, letting the captain die, when you might save him!"

"Don't get squally with me, now!" he retorted, a snarl in his voice. "You better pipe down some an' get appliable I'm only tellin' you now, for your own good!"

Peter Mayes, just at this moment entering the main cabin, caught Leadspitter's final words. Boatswain Saltash had temporarily relieved him. And now—

"Azy, Mr. Furlong!" he cut in. "Be azy with a lady, sir!"

"You stand clear o' this!" Leadspitter menaced him. "Or by the jumpin' Judas Priest—!"

"And you're a deepwater man!" mocked Isora. "You're mate of an old-time square rigger!"

"Mate, nothin'! The minute the cap'n gets knocked cold, I'm cap'n myself. My word's law aboard here now, for you an' all hands. Don't you go forgettin' *that!*"

SILENCED, Isora could only stare at him. Then her eyes sought Peter Mayes, Irish and more human than this cold beast. Might she not find in Mayes backing and support? But now Peter, duly warned and cognizant of the truth—the law that backed Leadspitter—only shook his head.

"That's right, miss," he affirmed. "Sure, Mr. Furlong's in charge now, from truck to kelson. I'm mate, meself, now." He swelled a little with importance at realization of his swift advance in rating. "Them orders as was gave Cap'n Bohannon, it's up to us to put 'em through!"

Standing straight as a weather shroud, she pondered a moment. Then once more she fell to washing the captain's wound.

"Go through with it, then," she presently said in a dissentient and rebellious tone. "But you'll be guilty of something terribly like murder—if he dies. You've put me in my place, right enough. There's only one thing, now, I'm going to ask for."

"And what's that?" arrogantly demanded Leadspitter.

"You've got to get all the help you can for him. Neither of you knows anything about surgical work. Neither do I, much, but there's some one aboard here, that does."

"Who?"

"That sailor, forward—the one who said the prayer for my father!"

Amazed, both stared at her. The cabin fell heavily still. Then all at once in a gust of passionate spite—

"Him?" cried Leadspitter. "That—"

"I don't care what he is!" the girl retorted, flushing with a fire of eagerness. "He may be everything you say. Probably is—and worse. But he knows something about surgery and medicine. Captain Bohannon, here, told me so, just the day I came aboard. He's said so, too, since then. You've got to have that man aft and see what he can do for the captain!"

"Nothin' doin'!" Leadspitter denied her. "Let that son of a sea cook stay forrard where he belongs. We ain't goin' to have him aft, tarred if we are!"

"See here, Mr. Furlong!" The tone and timber of her voice cut deep. "This is one thing I'm going to insist on. Get that man aft!"

"Ho, you're goin' to insist, are you?" mocked Leadspitter. "You know who

you're insistin' to?" His sneer was venomous. "I'm cap'n now. Don't you forget that!"

"You refuse me this, and do you know what's going to happen to you?"

"Well, what?"

"You're going to get some publicity. Plenty of it! I've got friends in the business world, the shipping world—"

"She's right, the lady is," cut Peter Mayes. "Sure, you're jammed, sir. Get the spalpeen aft, an' let's have it over with!"

"*Me*, bein' dictated to on my own ship?"

"You got to take it this once," Mayes asserted. "Jammed is what you are, sir. By the Jumpin' Jupiter, yes! You got to dance to her pipes just this once. If she was to tell as how you wouldn't get help for Bohannon, here, you might strike some heavy squalls later. Take an Irishman's advice, sir, an' run down the course she gives ye!"

"You'd better!" the girl crisply added. "And be quick about it, too! Another thing—" and she laughed oddly—"you've got no second mate now. You can't round the Horn without one. There's only one man can go second. That's Tyson—or Smith—or whoever he is!"

"Well, I *will* be damned!" Leadspitter roundly swore, now with no apology. "No, sir, not him. I—I'll take you, first!"

"Me?"

"That's what I said!" He grimaced with yellow teeth. "With that devil aft, we'd have red riot an' mutiny inside a week. No, miss, I'll give in on one p'int. Let him come aft to overhaul Bohannon. But put him second mate, nix!"

"You—you don't mean you'd really enter me on the log as second?"

"Sure as shootin', I would!" Fires of jealousy, of hate against Tyson, flamed in Leadspitter's soul. "I'll sign you on, with full pay an' all."

"But I've got no certificate!"

"Well, far 's a stifkit is concerned, he ain't, neither. Not as he can prove. And in a court o' law, between the two o' you, him with the record he's got, an' all, I can prove I done the best thing for the ship. You savvy navigation, all O.K. As for workin' ship, the bosun 'll stand watch with you an' handle the weather braces while you con her. Done, eh? You're second mate right now, miss! Officer o' this here ship, an'—" he added with a lightning flash of inspiration—"an' under my orders now!"

It fair dazzled him, this inspiration. The possibilities therein spelled fortune. Now, now indeed he held her in the hollow of his palm; now she must make the passage, till such hour as he could do away with her. Rebellion on her part, would that not be mutiny? Leadspitter tensed with greed and venom.

"You're actin' second mate! You'll sign the ship's articles an' I'll enter it on the log. You're under my orders, mind," he repeated, snarling up his lip. "Under my orders, now!"

Surprisingly, she laughed.

"Done!" she cried. "Send for that man!"

OLD ABEY BUZZARD carried the order forward; and presently into the cabin came Tyson, silent, alert and competent looking in spite of his rough beard and rougher clothes.

"What's wanted, sir?"

"Smith, I hear you know somethin' about doctor's work, an' such?" asked Leadspitter.

"Yes, sir," with a glance at the inert and bloody figure on the table, but none at the girl.

"Well, here's a job for you. Fix him up some way, the best you can. Make some kind of a missionary splice or somethin'. Get to it!"

"Very well, sir. I'll take charge and do what I can. Bring me plenty of water, soap and towels. More light, too, lamp, lantern, something!"

They were brought. Peter Mayes held the lantern. Tyson carefully washed and dried his hands. Isora noted their corded strength. Roughened, calloused though [they were by weeks of hauling

sheets and braces, still she saw they were the hands of a man and not a brute. Informed with the same alert vigor that filled his whole body, they looked powerful, yet deft and quick.

"Let's have some more light," Tyson ordered in a voice accustomed to command. "The lantern here, Mr. Mayes!"

Mayes just missed answering "Yes, sir!" as he obeyed.

"A little more this way—so! Now then, let's see!"

Wicked of eye, Leadspitter watched him. He hated the vigorous set of Tyson's shoulders, the tanned and well thewed turn of his throat, the intonations of his voice, everything about him.

"I ain't through with you yet," he pondered. "Not on your life an' license, I ain't!"

Without delay, Tyson set to work. Silence reigned. Only the rumor of Bohannon's labored breathing filled the cabin. As Tyson bent above him, the lantern cast grotesque shadows that bowed along the cabin wall. The watchers saw him cleverly palpate the wound. In his skilled exploration, his calm impersonality, Isora recognized his knowledge.

"How terrible," thought she, "for a man like this to be a ruffian and a criminal."

Under Tyson's fingers the bone yielded. Fresh blood welled.

"Skull's fractured, all right," he announced. "This case needs trepanning."

"Trepanning?" Isora asked. "You mean taking out a piece of bone?"

"Yes, and inserting a silver plate." His eyes rested on her a steady moment. "But of course that's quite impossible, here."

"Of course. What can you do, then?"

"Raise the bone as much as possible. Hold it in place, if I can. Keep the pressure off the brain."

"And he'll live?"

"There's a fighting chance. You see, the breathing center 's not affected. Nor the heart. The depressed area—you see? —is in front of the ear and nearly at the top of it. That affects the frontal convolutions, involves what's called the fissure of Sylvius."

"And what then?"

"Well, the chances are he *may* pull through. He may recover consciousness, even." And Tyson regarded the captain with a diagnostic eye. "If he does, though, he'll be completely out of commission for a long time."

"Helpless, you mean?"

"Not so much that, as dumb. Injury here, you see, paralyzes a man's speech. Yes, and his power even to write. His whole language machinery is smashed up. What's worse—"

"Huh?" put in Leadspitter. "What's that?" Exultation lay in his eye. "You mean he can't say nothin', if he comes out o' this?"

"Probably not. Or write, either. He might, if we could get this pressure off, but without hospital treatment—"

"Can't be done?" Leadspitter demanded.

"No. Not here." As a superior Tyson now answered. He omitted the sir. "What's still worse, without immediate treatment the skull 's liable to knit, this way. That 'll keep the pressure on. The job of removing it would be a lot simpler now than later. If the bone grows together this way, it'll be a far more serious matter operating on him. This man ought to be got ashore just as soon as possible."

"That'll do you!" exclaimed Leadspitter. "Your advice about that ain't asked nor wanted, whatever. Don't you forget you're only a forem'st hand! We've had all that out, 'bout goin' to port. The *China Gal* ain't goin' to put in nowhere. This here passage is goin' right on, without none o' your buttin' in, by Judas! All as is wanted o' you is patch him up the best you can an' then go forrard. We ain't dancin' none to *your* pipes, here!"

Tyson made no answer, save:

"Get me iodine, cotton, adhesive tape and bandages. Whisky, too."

Abey Buzzard, shaking and mumbling

to himself, fetched them from the medicine chest screwed to the bulkhead in Bohannon's cabin.

"Now then!" said Tyson, as he deftly fell to work.

CHAPTER IX

FEARS

ON THE morrow of these stirring events, two portentous things happened. The cat vanished and the shark returned. By vanished is meant that on this day his absence was first noted. Inquiry developed the fact that the ill favored creature had not been seen by anybody for three or four days. Whether he had fallen overboard or had become the victim of some massed rodential attack was never known.

"He'm gone, anyhow," Chubbock affirmed, "an' I'm wonnerful tore up in mind over dat. Evvery time I see a cat lost at sea, we had hard luck, hard as de hobs o' hell. If we ain't in fer some puckerin' times now, de old b'y's a saint!"

"You're damn' shoutin'," Stackhouse agreed. "Now we ain't got no mascot at all, an' by gary, that's bad. It strikes a dread to me, you can bet an' risk it!"

"Not as how I'm supe'stitious, ner nothin'," the Newfoundlander went on, "but you got to have some critter aburd. Any kind 'll bring luck—all exceptin' a goose. Next to shootin' a Mother Carey's chicken, wid de soul of a drowned sailor into it, losin' a cat is de worst luck you can find. We ain't niver goin' to get round de Harn, now. No ship as drownds a cat niver come safe to port. A wonnerful perishin' we'm goin' to have, sure t'ing!"

Standing in the galley door, on the lee side, he nodded at the little group of off watch men there sheltering themselves against the wind driven rain. Anxiety dwelt in his faded eyes.

"Ain't there nothin' yo' can do to take de jinx off?" asked Sam Broadfoot, the negro. "No way 't all?"

"Not until t'ree men dies, aburd yere," the cook affirmed. "One died a'ready. Dat layve two more to go. I figger de cap'n's goin' to be de next. After dat, ondly de Man Aloft knows who. Dat 'm a quare t'ing, 'bout bad luck. Ye got to be on de lookout for dat, ahl de time, or it 'll get ye. Meself, I allus carries a bit o' bread in me pocket—'comp'ny bread'—to kape off de Little People. But sometimes, even 'spite o' dat, dey 'll give ye your bring up!"

And old Chubbock launched into learned discourse as to the ill effects of wearing green, sailing on a Friday or a Sunday; looking at the setting sun and talking about it, reaching port on a Saturday night, or seeing a star too near the moon.

"Und if you sails mit a man as ain't pay his vashvoman," added Bielefeld, "dot's pooty bad, too."

"Yus," the Rock Scorpion put in, "an' so 's talkin' to a ghost when you sees one to the wheel. I wouldn't do it for ten quid! You talk to a ghost, an' you'll die, sure, inside a year!"

"What is this, anyhow?" demanded Tyson, lighting his pipe. "An old women's gabfest?"

"Clew up, parson!" Stackhouse retorted. "Everybody knows you're a Jonah, anyhow, by Keezer's ghost! You'll git took down, yit, I'm willin' to bet an' risk it. Less you says, the better. If there was one o' this here crew come up amongst the missin', we'd stand a dog-goned better show gettin' round the Horn. I ain't namin' no names, but whoever the shoe fits, let 'em put it on!"

Tyson laughed scornfully; but the talk went on about the old, immortal superstitions of the sea.

"It's the gal, I cackelate, as is the wusst part of it," Stackhouse judged. "A woman aboard ship—it's havin' her along, as brung down that there gear on the Old Man's conk, an' no two ways about it. Here she is, ain't she? Yes, an' not only that, but now damn' 'f she ain't been made an officer, an' can order us men round! Well, an' there's the cap'n, knocked flatter 'n a burnt boot, an' goin'

to slip his cable, likely. Jeems Rice! If you want any more proof, I'd like fer to know!"

"Can't *be* no better proof!" the cook affirmed. "We'm goin' to get in an awful fruz, afore we'm troo-up wid dis. We ain't goin' to get good luck enough to babtize a fairy, an' dat's true as de compass!"

INTO this atmosphere of tension and alarm, the shark entered with stunning effect. What shark? A shark, at all events; and *the* shark, as many aboard were ready to believe.

Not an hour after old Chubbock's jeremiad, with the ship driving southwest by south under a brisk and cool slant of wind, a sharp fin appeared in the wake of swirling gray.

"Comin' arfter the Old Man, than 'un is," judged Stackhouse. "*They* knows, them beggars does, when there's goin' to be fresh meat fer 'em. Right up on their shoe taps they are, fer it," he asserted, leaning at the rail to glimpse the ominous apparition. "You let a man git sick or die, an' you'll allus see one o' them divils skivin' along astarn. You can bet an' risk it!"

Only one procedure, of course, lay on the cards for the removal of this evil omen. Hook, line and a bait of pork were invoked to lay the wicked sprite. In less than a quarter hour the shark was swung aloft from the foreyardarm; was lowered and secured on deck. O'Hara was first to claim he recognized it.

"Holy Mother!" he cried, going sickly under his coat of tan, "if this here don't look like the very same feller we cut the liver out o', 'way to hell an' gone back!"

They crowded round, even the men on watch constrained by fear and wonderment to take time for a look at this amazing possibility.

"How it goin' for be de same one?" demanded the Frenchman. "Ain't dat one die long tam ago?"

"*Looks* like the same," O'Hara affirmed. "An' here's a cut place on its belly! I'll take my Bible oath—"

The shark had in fact been wounded on the belly at some time or other of its pugnacious career. The sandpapery skin showed a distinct scar. This was enough evidence, more than enough, for a good many. Jumbles of exclamations, oaths, shouts of astonishment and terror mingled.

"It's a fair do! It beats me!" Solomon Moon voiced general opinion. "I niver de divil iver!"

"Don't be a lot of damned fools!" Tyson mocked. "No shark could live more than a day or two with its liver cut out!"

They cried him down, though, eager for a miracle, twice willing to accept any portent of evil. Such a tumult arose that Leadspitter himself came to investigate. When the case was put to him:

"Well, I'll be tarred!" he exclaimed. "I wouldn't put it past no shark to turn trick like this. They're bad 'uns, by the Judas Priest!"

"Ain't none o' we niver seen de like, sir," spoke up old Chubbock, vastly agitated. "A rig'lar he-un of a shark. ain't he now, sir?"

"Better kill the son of a scaldy an' finish him off for good," Leadspitter directed. "That'll learn him to get funny with us!"

"Yeh, yeh, kill dat feller!" eagerly begged Sam Broadfoot. mindful of all he had been told about sharks' particular fondness for dark meat. "Lawdy, I ain't goin' to feel safe till he's plumb jam dead!"

"If you'd killed that other shark, as I told you to," Tyson commented, "think of all the fun you'd have missed, scaring yourselves half to death now!"

"Stow that!" mouthed Leadspitter. "I'll 'tend to this here without none o' your gab. Look alive now, some o' you swabs. Get a hatchet an' we'll fix him!"

" 'Scuse me, sir," put in Chubbock, "but I knows a wonnerful better way to do, 'an just killin' him. I'm t'inkin' he come back fer his liver, ain't it? My dear man, yes! Ondly way us can offshoot de bad luck, 'll be rip un up again an' putt de

liver back. After dat, he'm goin' to layve us be, an' don't ye doubt it!"

Fresh arguments burst out; but something in the grisly suggestion tickled Leadspitter's sardonic fancy.

"Heave ahead then, bullies," he almost grinned. "But all you sons o' ones on watch, you get back to work afore I learns you how! The rest o' you, trim him up proper. We'll show him!"

They proved to the shark, indeed, that the supreme creation of the universe, called man, is not to be trifled with. In common with all wild creatures that humankind can come at, the shark learned his lesson thoroughly. Paavola ripped up the ineffectually writhing monster. The liver was fetched from where it had been dripping, and was duly sewn up in the shark's belly. Not even the fact that the shark already had one perfectly good liver seemed to have much effect in dispelling the illusion that this was the very same shark they had previously tortured. Were it not that the majority of men hold beliefs at variance with reason, where, pray, would most human institutions end?

The sewing up completed, the creature was again swung overboard. Amid cheers, gibes, mockeries, it splashed into the sea and swiftly disappeared in a lash of foam.

Tyson growled—

"If animals have any idea of heaven, it must be a place where there aren't any men!"

"Blimey, parson, but you oughta know!" the Cockney sneered. "Perish my pinkies, yus!"

WORK continued, in better spirits now; work that the advent of the shark had so amazingly interrupted. This was the permanent repairing of the general damage to the ship when the chain mizzen topsail tie had carried away.

New blocks were procured from the boatswain's locker and a new chain tie cut and sent aloft to replace the preventer that had been used for temporary repairs. At the same time the last coil of four inch line was broken out for a new fall, the old one—like most of the ship's running gear—being found utterly unsafe for use as topsail halyards. In the meantime Chips started repairs on such parts of the quarter deck woodwork as had suffered damage in the catastrophe that promised to finish Bohannon.

Thus the life of the ship gradually resumed its accustomed routine. Fears for a while diminished. Better feeling prevailed as the ship continued to make her southing. Nothing like a little judicious superstition and its relief by miracle or cruelty to revive the hearts of men.

ON INTO the South day after day plunged the *China Girl*, on past the River Plate, on toward the waiting Horn.

Day after day the weather worsened as the ship won into the roaring forties. The sky grew dull and mottled with surly clouds. Now and again the fading sun was obscured by veils of mist through which it could hardly fight its way.

Betimes, savage rains struck, in which—as old Chubbock said—leaden waters fell "as if dey'd niver get anodder chanst." And there was toil aplenty, shifting from the summer suit to heavy weather canvas, grooming the ship for her battle round old Cape Stiff.

Leadspitter, now captain, put more westing into the course, bearing up almost directly for Cape Tres Puntas, which lies only a little more than five degrees north of the Straits of Magellan. In the latitude of Punta Delgada, they ran into a "snifter," a lively and snorting norther that for a time gave all hands as much as they cared to do. Leadspitter proved himself a driver. He showed himself unwilling to take a stitch off until the last possible moment, but kept jogging full pelt, carrying full and sending the vessel along kicking, her canvas a-strain, stiff as boards. In his desire to keep all drawing though the wind harped ominously in the rigging, to reel off the long sea miles, he betrayed the eagerness now consuming

him. Fevered eagerness, indeed, to reach journey's end, with all the wealth he now was planning should be his alone.

The old ship, under too great a press of canvas and with her logy cargo of railroad iron, proved far from sea kindly. In a blow she was stiff of helm and outrageously rolled down. As the great dirty green hills of brine, curling with white crests, came trundling in, they lolloped aboard; thundered over the forecastle head and swept the main deck in swirls of netted froth. Still Leadspitter only unwillingly reduced canvas, and drove her all he knew.

"He'm a beggar to crack on, dat un is," Solomon Moon affirmed. "If dat'm de way he goin' to rattle it, we'm goin' to have one stoutish block of a time roundin' de Harn, me lucky b'ys!"

Whereat grumblings grew louder forward; and fear, in the hearts of many once more began reviving.

Little cared Leadspitter. On the day following the accident to Bohannon he had ordered the stricken man borne from the captain's private cabin to one of the spare rooms. He himself had moved in to Bohannon's quarters and made himself at home with all the captain's belongings. While old Abey Buzzard had cared for Bohannon, tending him like a baby, Leadspitter had hardly so much as even inquired after Bohannon's progress. He had, however, taken good care to search the captain's pockets and secure the Old Man's key ring. On this hung keys to the safe, to the medicine chest, to the handcuffs the ship carried, and some few others.

One key, Leadspitter found, had fitted the drawers of the captain's desk. He had not even jibbed at searching those drawers and at appropriating a pocketbook containing nearly three hundred dollars of Bohannon's money. This he had put in lockfast security in the safe, along with Isora's gems and money—over which, by the way, he had spent certain private and exultant moments. A turn, a trick of fate, had as yet kept Bohannon's twenty thousand of blood money out of Leadspitter's hands. Sealed in their envelope, those yellowbacks still lay folded in an old page of the New York *World*, where Bohannon—perhaps foreseeing possible necessities for camouflage—had hidden them. Leadspitter's clumsy fingers and unimaginative eye had not yet discovered that treasure trove. But what he had already garnered, sufficed to waken in him passionate eagerness for this journey's golden finish.

"It can't come too damn' soon for me, by Judas Priest!" day after day he thought. "Off the Horn, she gets the sea toss, that gal does. An' then, by God, if all this stuff ain't mine, whose is it, eh?"

THROUGH all, wind or rain or weeping wave, the routine of the ship continued. It steadily went on, while Bohannon, still alive and betimes even half conscious, lay inert and speechless and apparently without thought. A mere two hundred pound lump, Bohannon vegetated. Bandages still covered his bald head, leaving but one eye exposed under his gray and bushy brow. Hawk nosed, scar wealed along the cheekbone, he lay helpless as an infant only five minutes born.

So things went on—the old, weary grind of labor, grumbling, cursing; of eating rotten grub that steadily grew worse; of handling heavy canvas and swinging ponderous yards; of laying aloft under the snatch of dangerous wind and in blind, gross darkness, to shorten sail. But a new factor of toil had made itself manifest—pumping ship. The bilge for some time had ceased to be satisfactorily foul, foul bilge, as every man knows, being a sign that a ship is "tight as a bag".

The old *China Girl*, with even the moderate racking and battering she had already received, had indubitably begun to leak. Until the half gale had caught them, off Punta Delgada, twenty minutes' pumping in each watch had sufficed—not excessive for a fairly worn ship of respectable age; nothing to cause alarm.

Since then, though, the old fly wheel

at the main fiferail had gradually taken longer and longer to obtain a suck.

"An' now, d'ye mind," Boatswain Saltash had privily admitted to Tyson, "it take nigh an hour in each watch. Wouldn't wonder if she's spewin' her oakum." He worried at his stringy gray mustache. "This sure hits me between wind an' water!"

"I've seen 'em leak twice as bad as this one, and yet pull through," Tyson had replied. "Leak like a basket, but make port."

"But not go round the Horn! The way that water's comin' up, fresh, an' the depth of it when Moon sounds the wells—I'd rather chat with the Old Scratcher than have it this way. Good civil wedder, no great kill or cure, mebbe. But we got some shockin' times ahead, beatin' round the Horn this season o' the year. She's started some seams, that's what she has. An' with one man dyin' aboard here a'ready, another goin' to die, likely—it's a fair do, that's all *I* got to say!"

Knowledge that the ship was leaking fast added to the ferment of discontent already brewing, forward. Most of the blame was laid on the presence of the girl aboard. What made it worse, was she not now an officer? Unparalleled, unheard of situation! No one could deny that Isora was proving competent. When on watch, she trod the quarter deck steadily as any man. Her orders, loosing or setting sail, were as correct, incisive, were couched in sea language as proper as any could require. But—a woman in command!

At the very beginning of her work, some of the wastrels had slobbered their tasks, growling obscenities beneath their breath. Leadspitter and Peter Mayes had soon with tongue and fist put an end to that. They had convinced the soldiering and evil spoken ones that when Isora was on watch her word was the ship's law. Isora's own clever seamanship had helped bring them to rights. And presently her orders had begun being carried out as smartly as if those orders had come from Leadspitter and Mayes themselves. Which, to speak truth, was at best none too smartly.

Still underground currents of rebellion and of fear were penetrating. Superstition, dread, the age old traditions of the sea, all these were steadily at work. And as days passed and weather grew more foul, an ominous spirit came to dwell on the old and weary ship.

LONG night watches below, while lantern gleams fingered unshaven faces and glinted on ignorant, credulous eyes, the crew talked of eery and of frightening things, such as men like these have ever believed by land or sea, and ever will.

One told how two lamps burning in a single room or cabin always brings grisly misfortune.

"Dat'm a fact, b'ys," old Chubbock roundly corroborated. "I set into a room once, wid two lamps, an' on de heel of it what happened me? I got ketched by a block an' tayckle an' lost me claw, or de best part of it. I did, so!" And holding up his mutilated hand, he worked thumb and little finger nipper fashion. "If dat don't prove it, what do?"

"We ain't never goin' for have two lantern in de focsle, here," the Miquelon Frenchman asserted. "One, all ri'. T'ree, fine! But two—no, sir, *nom de Dieu!*"

They told of evil chance pursuing any man the first to enter a new house.

"'Cause why?" asked O'Hara. "'Cause sure, don't the Old B'y himself own ahl new things?"

Tyson laughed bitterly.

"If foolishness was a pain," he commented, "you'd all of you be howling, this very minute."

"You better cut dat off, nippin'!" growled Noah Landerry, through a reek of pipe smoke. "Dere's some men such bad luck, just in deirselves, dey'd take a whole load o' harse shoes an' turn 'em into bad luck magnets! Not namin' no names, but—"

Thus they murmured together in the forecastle, thus they recounted myth and fable as fact, thus revived primeval superstitions, deep rooted, like so many

faiths, in the world's abysmal past.

That night, ever returning in ellipses of recurrent thought, always some reference arose to Isora Raineaux, the amazing second mate. Fear of her presence seemed to complement each bit of sinister sea lore. Bohannon's injury and probable death, the increasing leak, ugly threatening weather, fear of the Horn—all these and more they laid upon the woman's shoulders.

"If ye're askin' me, b'ys," Landerry asserted, "askin' me when we'll get round de Harn, I'll say it'll be on Tibb's Eve—which is niver de divil iver. We'm bound to be muckered, bad, if we kapes goin' like dat."

"An' if I had my way, we'd never chance it 't all," growled Stackhouse, with great accuracy aiming tobacco juice at the wooden spit kid. He sat in his bunk, leaning thin shoulders forward, elbows on knees. Now and again he coughed. "I cal'late we're all headed straight fer hell, tight's we can hammer. That's *me!*"

Old Chubbock nodded agreement.

"We hadn't oughta chanst it, me sons. We'd oughta turn back now, afore it'm too late. Hayve up dis cruise, entire, afore we'm turned over, bad!"

"*Ach Gott!*" Bielefeld murmured. "If ve only haf to put in someveres, mebbe Santa Cruz or de Falklands, I jump de ship, quick. I safe me mein own skin, anyhow. Let de ship go round der Horn —or to hell—if she vant to. *Aber,* if I get half a chance, you soon de last off me see!"

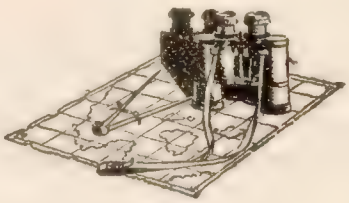
He raked his fringe of whiskers with a blue tattooed hand, then fell a-muttering to himself in Platt Deutsch, and seemed with an abstracted inner eye to be contemplating things far beyond the range of earthly vision.

"Us can't even kape a cat, an' evverybody knows what losin' a cat manes," gloomily boded the cook. "It's enough to scare de wits out of a squid, it is, so! De bottom's out of our bucket entirely. Dis here v'yage is like to see de bring up of us ahl, I'm t'inkin'!"

He launched into a fresh litany of disaster. And so the long, black watch wore on; and from without, the terror and mystery of the almighty sea reached for their souls and shook them, quivering.

Penetrated by the spirit of disaster, those gathered in that frail structure felt that the very stars—though that night hidden—were fighting against them in their courses. To them it seemed the cold fingers of the powers of darkness were prying, wrenching, tearing to reach the hated human creatures who, so greatly afraid, now in awe struck words were fumbling to voice their fears.

Thus on and on toward something that no man could guess, through blackest night staggered that lonely ship upon that far and lonely sea.



TO BE CONTINUED

Of course it was easy to understand
Patient Bob's handling of the bad man~

WHEN EVERYBODY KNEW

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

A SWAGGERING monster of a man, with long, tangled black hair, a cascade of blue steel whiskers and sunken caverns for eyes, thundered on thick soled boots into the Many Moons Barroom where he surged with long and eager strides to the center of the three man width of liquid counter. As he approached, those between him and his apparent point of destination spread swiftly to right and left.

"Set 'er up!" he growled, shaking his head, snorting, and turning from side to side till he had surveyed the whole circumference of the establishment with his sunken, glowing eyes.

He drank what looked to be a ridiculously little drink for so huge a carcass; he wriggled all the way down as the tiny shot burned in his throat. He gurgled and choked, as if the drink were in proportion to him, and after four or five fillings of the barrel shaped little glass he reached tentatively for the outflaring yellow handled revolver which was of a size in proportion to his beef. He gave sidelong glances into the big mirrors behind the bar after three or four false alarms with his gun. And he had a drink after each half completed movement.

Then suddenly he pulled and let go a shot. He looked around. The bartenders stood with their hands lifted, like squirrels' paws, and other patrons of the place were skittering without dignity out of the way, drawing toward the front and rear entrances through which the ones who always avoided trouble vanished like mist cloud shadows. The big fellow took some more drinks, and at intervals in a

tentative kind of way he let go a booming shot. And presently, when he had reloaded his cylinder twice from loose ammunition in his trousers pockets he threw a pinch of silver on the bar, enough to pay for his drinks, and surged into the square.

There, with his big legs spreading, he weaved and swayed while he looked around. Court House Square of Boxelder was a glow and a sparkle of yellowish lights, with here and there the colors of red, green, blue and sundry hues, the brighter places being saloons, dance halls, gambling places, the most ornate of which had pool and billiard tables imported at enormous cost. Large boxlike buildings were dull—the reputable emporiums of trade, where hardware, food, dry goods and outfits were to be bought.

Swing doors were flashing to the shadows of ingoing or outgoing figures. As he looked around, the big fellow caught flashes of sparkling points, the eyes of humans, shining in the gloom like those of dogs or cats, some green, some golden, some purple.

"I'M BILL of Buck Hill!" the man murmured in his throat, so that it sounded like a growl; and then, louder, "I'm Rearin' Bill of Buck Hill!"

He looked around rather expectantly, and raised his chin higher, throwing back his head.

"I'm Rearin' Bill of Big Buck Hill!" he shouted. "I'm two yards wide and nine feet high—*Woo-who-o! Woo-who-o!*"

At that shout—"*Woo-who-o!*"—men, standing at every bar around the square and all the way down to the Claybank Delight, turned and glanced at one another.

" 'Tain't Texas!" One shook his head. "That'd be *e-yeow-w!*"

" 'Tain't Prairie—hit'd be *Hi-i-i-i!*"

" 'Tain't Rebel—'tain't Yank." An old veteran shook his head.

" 'Tain't old Mississip' shanty boat landing whoop er soundin' hail."

"Ner mule skinnin' cowboy—none of them!" another declared.

"That's green timber!" a square shouldered, high headed man remarked as he turned a sheet of a weekly paper in the lobby of Squint Legere's hotel.

"My lan'! He's bad!" A bystander shook his head. "Y' c'n tell that—the way he growls— My lan'!"

"Who is he?" some one asked, and another raised a warning hand.

"Cyarful, ol' man! He's from Buck Hill. I've been t' Buck Hill. Hit's way yonder in the head of Snake Creek Bad Lands. My land'! I was glad the sun didn't set on me up theh; yes, indeedy! He's Rearin' Bill—my lan'! Don't 'tagonise 'im. He comes from a bad country!"

The hoarse, rumbling growling of the man thus identified came around the square in the middle of the street. Horses hitched along the tie rails turned their heads to look at the phenomenon going by, twitching their tails and snorting a little under their breaths. A dog ran out in the dark from the sidewalk, wagging its tail, yipping as it pranced. Rearing Bill turned and growled at the vagrant beast, and the dog stood on its hind legs in an enthusiastic invitation to come on and play!

Some one laughed in the gloom of a passageway between two saloons. Rearing Bill threw a bullet into that shadow insult and then slammed two shots which sent the dog squealing in creased terror the other way around the square. A man's yell of alarm rose frantically from the passageway and the clatter of loose boards and the fall of a stack of booming empty kegs reverberated around.

"*Woo-who-o!*" Rearing Bill whooped, and the echoes returned from faces of Bad Land cliffs.

"Lawse, he c'n shore yell!" listeners said in low voices.

AS THE big fellow shambled nearer, the gamblers around the tables hesitated, the drinkers at the bars held their liquor poised, looking over their shoulders at the front doors; and those with nothing special to divide their attention withdrew to the rear or side

entrances. The bartenders, who must perforce stay and take it, wiped their hands on their aprons, their fingers twiddling, all except Flat Face Dink of Squint Legere's liquid annex. Flat Face Dink lifted the corner of his lips; then he gave the long, red, cherry wood bar an extra dry polish.

"My gracious!" the observing Tid Ricks whispered. "Dink don't care f'r anybody in the world! He's all nerve, Dink is! Come the devil himself and Flat Face'd say to him, 'Name yer pisen, old boy—how's hell t'day?' He would, honest! I bet he would."

A heavy footfall out in front of Legere's shook the planks till they boomed and creaked. Rearing Bill of Big Buck Hill surged into the middle of the barroom. Tid Ricks shrank into a corner. Patrons along the bar watched anxiously through the mirror reflections. Flat Face Dink deliberately turned his back and stacked up a pyramid of glasses.

"I want pisen!" the newcomer declared, shambling toward the bar, where they gave him ten feet width according to his size, looks and actions.

Flat Face Dink flipped up a quart bottle, tall, straight sided and long necked, and set up a thick, fluted glass to hold two good liquor drinks. Rearing Bill looked at the glass, picking it up.

"Put 'r thar, mister!" Rearing Bill said, enthusiastically. "You got a measure 'cording to the man here—put 'r thar!"

Flat Face Dink colored happily under that praise, and drank with Rearing Bill, something he never did except with the most distinguished of patrons.

Rearing Bill holstered his gun with the stained ivory handles. He was a gentleman among gentlemen, in Squint Legere's, all on account of the appreciation of Flat Face Dink of the appropriateness of measures for a man, serving glasses according to one's size. Rearing Bill surged forth into the street again, popped away a couple of times and went on his way.

He began to sing:

"I'm Rearing Bill of Big Buck Hill.
Snake pisen is my cure.
Of human flesh I eat my fill;
An' I takes my whisky pure."

He ended the verse with a chorus of shots. He aimed at lights, which crashed in broken glass, for he could shoot pretty straight. His gunfire made the horses nervous, and they pranced around. When he was on one side of the square men scurried on the opposite side to remove their mounts, either racing out to the livery barn and corral or down toward Strollers' Campground on the creek bottom.

Rearing Bill's horse was built on his own generous scale, but he had begun to ride it when it was too young; and now the beast, which would have been a good draft horse, was a swayback with a tired look in the lop of its ears. When Rearing Bill came by, however, the animal pranced and shook nervously.

WORD had been sent to City Marshal Pete Culder, who was out in his home cabin. The messenger said that Rearing Bill from Buck Hill had come to town. At least, the fellow had said he was Rearing Bill and acted as bad as they make them. Gulder promised to come right down, but he wasn't seen by any one on that hectic night.

After shooting up Court House Square the disturber went into saloons and took tentative shots at bottles and glasses. Keen observers noticed that he shot with accuracy. He held his biggest of revolvers with a free, powerful grip which on the pull landed the lead slugs in whatever he aimed at, whether tin lamp base or peak glass on a pyramid of glasses.

Rearing Bill shambled from saloon to saloon. On each circuit he became more uproarious, more exacting in his demands; and when in the Happy Medium a frightened bartender put out a half size whisky glass instead of a double size according to the fashion set by Flat Face Dink, Rearing Bill with a grizzlylike swipe of the muzzle of his gun knocked the unfortunate liquor clerk senseless. He then

stood, amused for an instant by the spectacle of the poor devil sprawled limp on the floor.

"Heh!" Rearing Bill snarled. "Cheat me on m' liquor, eh! Heh!"

He turned, surging to glare from sunken eyes at the white faced onlookers. As he stared at them one by one they all shrank, watchful of the swinging of the carelessly handled revolver, the drunken man's unsteady finger on the trigger, the hammer drawn back at full cock and the big, powerful paw holding the barrel as steady as a mounted cannon.

THERE was in Boxelder a shiftless, shaky, friendless hanger-on known as Odd Jobbing Det Linver, a huddled up, raggedly dressed fellow who was kicked around by every one. There had been an interval of ten or fifteen minutes' quiet when Odd Jobbing Det appeared in Squint Legere's barroom. The man who had been reading the weekly paper in the lobby laid it on the hotel clerk's desk and entered the barroom from the lobby just as Det entered from the rear alley, looking anxiously behind him.

Rearing Bill had catfooted, as softly as a grizzly bear on the sneak, into the front entrance. Flat Face Dink looked up with a genial smile of welcome, so the bully grinned widely as he started for the bar. Thus Odd Jobbing Det backed right into the very big fellow he was scared to meet. It was an abrupt collision.

Rearing Bill grunted. He glanced around, stopped and saw the cringing, shrinking wretch who looked up at him with utterly abject fear. For an instant Rearing Bill stared and glared; then he began to grin as he surged at the victim thus thrown in his way. Odd Jobbing Det backed till he was stopped by the wall. Then Rearing Bill cuffed and kicked, abusing the wretched weakling, who blubbered, whimpered, choked and begged. The more he pleaded for mercy the more the bully slapped and poked him with the big revolver.

"I've a notion to kill you," Rearing Bill suggested tentatively, "'sultin' me thataway. I've a notion to cut yer heart out an' eat it! I've a notion to shoot ye—'sultin' me. Me—bumping into me—walkin' all over me. I've a notion to kill an' eat ye f'r breakfast—"

The spectators, shrinking along the walls, edging away, froze with expectancy as they saw the tentative suggestion of murder congealing into determination to kill. Rearing Bill had worked himself up to a fury. He was weaving in savage ferocity. He glanced around, covertly, from under his bushy brows, taking in the white faces and the fears in the eyes of the beholders.

"Yes, sir, I'm going t' kill you!" he suddenly snarled.

But, like a cat playing with a victim, Rearing Bill deliberately delayed. Here was a worthless, terror stricken, utterly helpless and friendless victim. Odd Jobbing Det looked his sorry misery and his voice went up in a shrill breaking wail of hopeless terror, for he felt the drunken brute's determination to "get a man", establishing a reputation as bad, killing to see a victim kick.

The man who had been reading the paper gazed curiously at the spectacle. He had recognized the whoop of Rearing Bill as that of a green timber woodsman, a logger from the pine, spruce or hemlock belt somewhere. Now he saw the big fellow clearly and, staring at him in surprise, recognized him.

"Why, you damned skunk!" he muttered, just like that, and started straight across the barroom, bare handed.

There was a gasp of amazement among the other spectators. Rearing Bill heard or felt the difference in the echo. He froze for an instant as he cunningly turned his eyes to look out of their corners. He discovered the swift approach of the spectator and turned to look.

Rearing Bill's face convulsed. A regular gorilla expression of ugliness and cruelty crossed his features. He had clicked his teeth and shaken his tangled mane, fluffing up his steel black whiskers. At sight of the interrupter he shrank in

precisely the same way that Odd Jobbing Det had done, and lines of cruel satisfaction changed to the same quivering of terror and pleading.

"I didn't mean nothing! I didn't mean nothing! I were jes' foolin'!" Rearing Bill's voice rose higher and shriller. "I wa'n't really goin' to hurt 'im, Mister Benson! Hones'—honest!"

"You lie!" the other exclaimed, cuffing the big face backhandedly. Under cover of the stinging blow, Benson snatched the huge revolver from the loose grasp of the bully's hand.

Then with the barrel of the weapon Benson pounded the big fellow across the floor, backward. Rearing Bill yelped, cried out, choked and at last turned to run. Contemptuously, Benson gave him a kick; and then as the bully yelled he fired the big gun at the floor under him so that the huge boots bobbed high and thumped to frantic efforts at escape, crashing out into the night. Outside Rearing Bill raced, plunging to the sway-back drayhorse, and he rode furiously away in the dark, heading up Snake Creek.

WHEN he was out of hearing, his nervous yelps lost away in the Bad Land distance, the crowd came back into Squint Legere's barroom to see what miracle had changed the echo of Rearing Bill's whoops. They found the other stranger, Benson, unloading Rearing Bill's revolver of the yellow stained ivory handles. Bystanders whispered excitedly at what this fellow had done, barehanded, right after calling Rearing Bill a skunk.

"My lan'!" Tid Ricks gasped. "I never hoped to see anybody brave as that—my. gracious! He just acted like he wa'n't 'fraid of nothing in the world, yes, sir! Why, he slapped that big feller 'fore he even took his gun away! It was the nerviest thing anybody eveh did get to see!"

Squint Legere did the honors. Benson just must take a drink.

"I'll take one," he assented, "and no more."

He meant it. No one urged, or even suggested, a second drink. Benson went to the night clerk for his room key. Legere checked him at the foot of the stairs.

"Excuse me," Legere said. "Course, I mind my own business—but you knew him?"

"Oh, yes! Went to school together."

"That so! Back East, I expect?"

"Yes, Minnesota."

"That makes me think. You're Benson—Robert Benson," Legere said, "I see by the register."

"Oh, yes!"

"Not—uh—not Patient Bob—uh?"

"Why—" the flicker of a reminiscent smile crossed his face—"I've been called that—"

"Shu-u!" Squint exclaimed, softly. "Course, I mind my own business, Mister Benson!"

"Course, I know that. Well, good night!"

Squint Legere returned to the bar where he was awaited with interest by a curious crowd.

"He's Patient Bob," Squint remarked in a low voice.

"Not — Say, Patient Bob Benson! Shu-u-u-u!" voices gasped.

"An' I seen 'im settin' theh all the ev'ing, reading the paper, cool as you please!" Tid Ricks broke the silence. "Why, he neveh even looked up when that old fourflusher come shootin' by, no, suh! I seen it with my own eyes. I knowed he was *good*. Same time I neveh dreamed he was Patient Bob—but when he got to goin'—course—"

"Course!" others assented. "Anybody'd knowed, then, he was *good!*"

The BUDDHIST MONK

The story of a brilliant young naturalist who lost his soul and found it again amid the unfathomable mysteries of the East

By THEODORE ROSCOE

RAIN had fallen that evening, and Addadud Gul, the old Afghan bird vender, had withdrawn his wizened head from the crowded bazaar, shut himself up in his little shop that reeked with variegated smells, and spent an hour musing over a hubble-bubble. Thus had I found him, crosslegged under a cloud of smoke, face placid as though he were drinking the wine air of the hills and the temperature ran sixty instead of a hundred ten. I had gasped, and chatted, finally chancing on the subject of a certain Buddhist monk, a collection of bones and skin with one eye, who had squeaked into town that afternoon. And it was Addadud Gul, sly old vender of birds, who offered the salient commentary:

"A woman can make a man believe in love. Opium can make a man believe himself king or able to jump through a keyhole. But a Buddhist monk can make a man believe in anything."

Which epigram has not a little bearing on this story.

I

THAT river was no place to be, and the job was no job to have. I was on the river, and I had the job.

For ten years I had lived on that river, trading and collecting specimens and forgetting, and I was afraid of it. The natives called it something meaning "green poison," and the natives were right. Green poison. A name just suiting that meandering finger of slime snaking its way down the jungle bottoms to crawl at last into the Gulf of Siam. It was not a river of water. A steamy, twisty canal of scum it was, alive with disease and a living stench that hung on the surface like a mist. Water rats splashed in the grass green sludge. Gavials yawned a million teeth as they floated up from the mud, their black tails flipping in the lukewarm, stagnant water. Venomous fat snakes sunned on rotting logs along the banks. All the wayward creatures that slink and slide seemed lurking in that river; spawning on its marshy, jungle woven shores; wriggling through water yellowed by the perverted sunlight filtering through the bamboo thickets. An evil thing that jungle river, bilious with the breath of Asia, sick and hot and creepy.

We stood on the wormy dock, Crawford, his wife and I, three ghosts in the muggy twilight, waiting for the river boat to poke its pug nose around the bend. I was going to escort the amiable couple down river. That was the job I had, and the job I didn't like. Crawford kept looking at me with those big, misty, reproachful brown eyes of his—the only human things in his worn face—and it made me want to yell. It wasn't my fault. I didn't want to drag him down that river, God knows.

Crawford was a young naturalist who had been engaged in research upstream, and Crawford had gone to the dogs. Folks in those back jungles found it mighty easy to go to the dogs. The heat gets you first and eats the flesh from your bones. The fever gets you next and eats the bones in your flesh. If you don't look out you get lazy and shiftless, and do queer things.

Crawford was a sensitive, brilliant chap who never should have come to the East. We of the white colony gave him a year to stick it out. At first he was all right, didn't boss the gin bottle too much, did his work well; and we began to think he was going to get away with the job. Then he got soaked with malaria and went on a trip to Mitho for a breath of air. And he came back with a wife.

YOU SHOULD have seen his eyes when he first told us about her. The way he described her we thought he had married a *houri* from Paradise. And when we first saw that bride of Crawford's we could have died. He hustled her on to my bungalow veranda, and Schneider, the Dutch trader, who is prim as a Holland housewife, spilled rum all over his lap. I know I was almost paralyzed. We thought he had married some pretty little fool from the French quarter. Mrs. Crawford was neither pretty, little, nor a fool; and if she was a *houri,* then a lot of Moslems are going to be disappointed.

She was one of those gaunt, stringy women with an iron jaw, a handshake and an abortive mustache. She cut off Crawford's introduction, and told us in no uncertain terms that she had been in social work, hated drink, natives, men who sat around in pajamas and men who didn't shave. Lord! The woman was as perfect a martinet as ever bossed an army. How Crawford came to marry her was astounding mystery. A man in skirts. The kind of woman who would clutch a fellow's throat after he had kissed her and tell him now they must be married.

I know Crawford adored her at first. Love is like that. For a week he shaved and swept his compound and changed his ducks. Then the hot season set in, and the man's crash was abysmal. He got mildly drunk one afternoon, and his wife probably landed on him like a ton of bricks. I could just imagine it. She

was not the sort to understand. She should have been running a girl's school, and she bent all her enterprise on reforming her husband. But men aren't reformed in the tropics, especially in that little corner of hell. All her nagging and scolding and grim energy sent him creeping down to happy street where wives and jungles are forgotten in the smoke of little pipes.

From then on Crawford went fast. His acquaintances were horrified, but could do nothing. We watched the poor chap shake to pieces like a straw dummy on a jerking string. His cheeks sucked in, caverns sank beneath his eyes; he grew rail thin, twitchy, wretched.

It was a doped and dozy husk that Mrs. Crawford dragged into my bungalow that morning. She sternly announced her intention of taking Crawford to Anam where her mother lived. Once away from blasphemous and unshaved adventurers, he could be pounded into a man again. What's more, she told me I was going with them. I was the only man in the colony fit to help her—and not too fit, at that—and I would have to go.

Crawford blubbered and swore and protested, but the woman was not to be denied. She had married a dud, a farce who had collapsed like an accordion after a week's strain of being respectable, and she was not going to be the goat. In vain I told her the river was hell, the river boat a vermin nest; that if she wanted to take Crawford away we'd best go slowly and make an overland trip through the hills. Three weeks overland? Not if she knew it! The river trip was only four days, and that was the way we were going . . .

THE APPEARANCE of the river-boat roused me from revery. As it staggered around the bend like some giant amphibian, Mrs. Crawford nudged me and snatched up her bags. Wiping sweat from my cheeks, I watched the boat glide toward us out of the dusk. A scattering of silent natives lined the bank to watch the boat and us. The boat was a shapeless affair with high decks fore and aft, a lurching sail amidships. It had once been a schooner, but the river and old age had used it ill. As it poked its way shoreward the sail fluttered down, lascars with bamboo poles jumped on what had once been a forecastle head, dug their rods into the stream and swung the blunt prow to bump against the wharf. A line snaked out to one of the natives on the shore, splashed in the water, grew taut and drew the boat abeam. A score of ragged boatmen jumped ashore. A rattan gangway plopped to the wharf.

I had been desperately hoping that when Mrs. Crawford saw the rotten craft she would change her mind; for the boat was certainly a scrofulous looking affair. Black faces smirked at us over the high rail of the forward bow. The after deck was littered with crates, gear, snarled hawsers, garbage, strewn about in typical Chinese seamanship. A big yellow man was bawling at a figure swinging high in the rigging of the mizzenmast—at least it was where the mizzenmast ought to be—and the whole affair was fantastic chaos. Lord only knows how that hybrid junk ever navigated the river, to say nothing of crossing the northern end of the Gulf. And the crew looked as if it had been recruited from the choicest dives of Asia.

Mrs. Crawford was aboard before I knew it. Shunting her dazed husband before her, as a mother shoos a little boy, she marched up the gangway. I confess I suffered a momentary desire to give her the slip, but I couldn't abandon the woman and her useless wreck of a husband to the bosom of that pirate gang, so I grabbed my kit and followed.

Believe me, I should have known better and kept the couple ashore even if I had had to overpower them.

A beefy Malay vested in the authority of a pair of pants and a sailor's cap led us aft, motioning us to deposit ourselves in the vicinity of the taffrail. I bawled him out for the sake of establishing respect, and asked him where our bunks were.

He told us the skipper would see to that.

"I'm going below," announced Mrs. Crawford, "and find out. They aren't going to palm off any dirty old hole on me!"

"Wait, Mrs. Crawford," I protested. "Don't go down—"

"I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself," she snapped sourly. "It's only when I have a sick man on my hands that I need help. I'll thank you, Mr. Tracy, if you'll stay a moment with my husband. I've been on these boats before."

With an imperious gesture to the grinning Malay, she stalked forward.

The minute his wife was out of sight, Crawford snatched my arm, shoved his withered face into mine. From the shadow of his helmet his eyes glittered.

"For God's sake, Billy," he croaked, "get me some—get me some—"

He didn't say it, but I knew what he wanted.

"Nothing doing," I growled at him. "Brace up, Crawford, and be a man."

"You don't understand. I got to have it! I *got* to!" His skinny hand was clawing over his throat. "I got to have some," he babbled. "My God! Ain't had any in three days. Please! Please get me some, Billy! Please, Bill! Just a whiff! I didn't wanna come! Lemme go ashore! She made me come! Aw—ah—"

Tears wiggled down his face. He begged and swore and scrabbled, while I tried to push him away. I was sick, I tell you, right to the pit of my stomach; sick at the expression of awful yearning shining in his eyes.

"Cut it, you ruddy fool!" I snarled, wrenching from his grasp. "I haven't got any dope an' can't get any."

He burst into a flood of profanity, his voice hoarse and colorless, pouring foul invective on me, on his wife, on himself—a tirade ending in tears as he dropped, shaking, on the wheel-box. He calmed down in a moment; sat chin on palms, eyes staring out over the river, lips whispering. A hot breeze stirred the duck suiting that bagged on his shrunken form, flapped his jacket open, and I could see how horribly emaciated the poor chap was.

"So 'e's doped an' a-wantin' it, eh?" a soft voice spoke from the gloom.

I LOOKED up and saw a man standing on the top step of the after hatch. He was a big man; the loose white linen dungarees and jacket he wore made him seem bigger than he was, and he had on leather sandals and a blue officer's cap. A broad rawhide belt girdled his paunchy middle, and I saw a knife hilt lurking under his coat. Stepping from the hatchway, he stood in better light, and, fists on hips, surveyed us. A cheroot hanging from the puffy lips of his porcine face jerked and smoked as he spoke.

"I'm th' skipper. If there's anything I can do for you—"

Crawford turned to him, but I cut in before he could speak.

"No," I said. "There's nothing you can do."

He nodded pleasantly, touching his cap with a stubby thumb.

"Ain't often I gets th' honor o' carryin' English folks. Th' river ain't pleasant, an' most goes inland. Make y'self t' home on my little craft. I'm new on her. Come up recent from Georgetown way. Butler's my name, gennlemen, but I'm gena'lly known as th' Rose."

He opened his coat, his eyes twinkling like little buttons, and pointed to his chest. Even in the darkness it stood out against the bronze of his barrel-like breast—a gorgeous crimson blossom, a tattooed rose. He chuckled in a slow, oily sort of way. Removing the cheroot from his lips, he grinned; and a shock shuddered down my spine. The dimples in his cheeks only emphasized the horror. The Rose didn't have a tooth in his head!

A shout echoed up from amidships, and the apparition was gone. The boat was ready to sail. I hurried to the rail, sweating, to watch the lascars haul in lines. It was almost dark. Shadows of cobalt blue hung in the bamboo thickets along the bank. Bare feet pattered across

the deck. A patch of canvas fluttered up the foremast.

Then out of the jungle strolled a queer processional, a line of half naked natives with stork like legs and bobbing woolly heads. Filing from the underbrush, they headed for the boat; and when I saw their leader I got another shock. A Buddhist monk, he was, a collection of bones and skin, with one eye—the monk I had seen the day before. Silent as cats, the whole crowd padded up the gangway which rattled in behind them. The skipper let out a bellow. The schooner drifted from the shore. Sickly yellow twilight filtered out. The river steamed and stank. And as I hung over the taffrail listening to the burble of the green water, I assure the world I wasn't thinking of the love of God.

II

EVENTS that night certainly lived up to possibilities.

A somber, blood orange moon wheeled on to the horizon and painted crimson shimmerings on the surface of the river. From the impermeable shadows along the shore rose the chant of frog legions, the twittering of swallows. A hornbill chattered its chilly laugh, was answered by the cough of some nocturnal prowler. Soon the night was alive with a medley of jungle voices. Darkness turbid as ink defied the moonlight. The phantom glow of lanterns scattered about the river boat's deck only emphasized the murk.

From vantage point on the after deck, where the breeze seemed less torrid, I gave myself over to uneasy speculation. The night was drugged with tropic scent, sticky. One of those breathless, gaspy nights; and I longed for my bungalow veranda and a cool stinger. Mrs. Crawford had gone below to concoct a quinine drink. She had won herself fairly decent quarters for such a craft, and I hoped she would stay there.

She had been stalking the port rail most of the time, talking the head off her husband. He, poor devil, now sat near me in a camp chair, busy making faces at the sky, restless fingers plucking, eyes shut. In shadow his face showed blue with pallor, his hands like white butterflies fluttering in his lap. Some of the man's incessant nervousness conveyed itself to me and I got as jumpy as a witch standing there in the dark.

"Tracy. I say, Bill—"

His whispery voice was imploring.

"What?"

He was up, and had me by the arm.

"Listen, Billy. You can get it for me! Get me a pill, Billy. Get me—"

A shaft of light fell on his withered face. There was something awful in his expression when he got that way—something decadent, stale. His eyes yearned.

I shook him off, angrily.

"For the last time, no!"

Craving had him by the throat. He begged and quivered, sniveled, whined, implored.

"I haven't got any," I snapped. "You've got to quit this everlasting plea, Crawford. Every time you get me alone you start this damned racket for—for dope! You—"

"You don't understand! It—it's *life* to me! I—I got to have it! I forget. Everything! I—I'm somebody! I can do anything! I can—"

To this day I can hear it as I heard it then. Crawford's mouth gulped shut and his eyes went wide as he listened. I listened, too, and I tell you at first it almost knocked the props from under me. It sounded so much like the responsive readings in the dusk of the old meeting house back home, when the minister, a square of violet light falling from the stained glass window to make an aura on his bald spot, would declaim a verse from the psalter to be answered by a mumbling congregation. It sounded mighty strange, that chanted ritual, that murmured response, rising in the hot night from the fore deck of that river boat sneaking through the jungle. It made me forget Crawford. It made Crawford forget his dope.

Insistent, maddeningly intense, a canorous voice prayed out in the darkness. Chorus echoed, droning, the sing-song burning with fervor. I knew what it was. It was that Buddhist monk and his gang getting ripe for a prayer meeting. But Asians can pray in manner to make one listen. They pray as if their prayer meant something. That chanted ritual rolled up in the night, glowing with zeal.

"*Om ma-ni pad-me! Hung!* O, the jewel in the lotus! Amen!"

Crawford shot a frantic glance at me.

"Like church," he whispered. "What —what's going on?"

"That squad of Buddhists who flocked aboard when we sailed," I told him sourly. "They're herded up on the forward deck, an' their witch doctor will probably have 'em chanting and ranting all the way down. Evangelistic service."

"Let's see them—"

Anything to keep the man quiet. Picking way over a tangle of wet hawser, I started amidships; Crawford shambling after. We groped along the cluttered deck, hurried past a dimly lighted companion and came out on a sort of bridge overlooking forecastle head and well deck below. Standing watch, a negrito lounged on the port bridgewing, apparently ignoring the racket. Crawford did not ignore the racket, nor did I. It was a racket to be remembered.

THERE they were, jammed between the bows! A crowd of naked natives ranging shades from tar black to saffron, plopped on their knees before the Buddhist monk, who sat on a one-time capstan and not a little resembled a shriveled image of Gautama; they annointed their woolly heads with the oil of his voice. Yellow sarong wrapped close about him, face cleft with shadows, shaven skull gleaming, he looked a mummy sitting there; but his voice would have inspired a Sphinx.

What command of voice that old wizard owned! Hearing it chant or whisper or exult from the turkey neck of that one eyed bag of bones I could hardly believe my ears. As he moaned his threnody, his fingers counted the string of golden prayer beads—nuggets big as cherries—hanging from his throat. And every time he intoned a verse, those converts let out a groan and bumped their foreheads on the deck. Sweaty shoulders glistened in the red moonlight. Skinny arms shot skyward. Under the power of the monk's sonorous tongue those Buddhist converts juggled their souls and sought with frantic zeal the Noble Eightfold Way.

Of all evangelists I had ever heard, that one eyed monk was ace. Standing at the bridge rail, I watched him and his gang with a curious sensation of awe and disgust. A few more stirring chants and that bunch would be steamed up wild as Holy Rollers. It made me sick.

But Crawford was getting a real soul jolt from the thing. I ought to have known he would. I should have realized that the moonlight and the green river and the monk's voice and the jungle perfume would twist the sick man's nerve. Hands clutching the rail, he was staring pop eyed, face gone lemon color, sweat shining on his upper lip.

"That monk!" he was whispering to himself. "That monk!"

And before I could raise a hand he had scrambled down the bridge ladder and was pushing his way through the kneeling crowd. Expecting any second to see a knife buried in his shoulder blades, I hopped down the ladder after him. Before I could catch him by the arm, he had reached the monk and was grabbing at the yellow sarong.

"Save me!" he was croaking. "Save me, holy man!"

If you think I was not ill then, you are wrong. Kicking through that mob of salaaming beggars, I got to Crawford's side. But the monk was off the capstan, rattling his beads under Crawford's chin.

"Peace, my friend. Peace. May the fragrance of the August Blossom bring rest to the soul. May—"

Stunned I certainly was by the old mendicant's precise English, by Craw-

ford's preposterous stare; but I had enough wit to speak quietly before that overwrought mob of converts.

"Come away, Crawford," I growled in his ear. "Get out of here. Come on!"

One white eye bored into me as the old monk pronounced in low tone:

"The man is ill. Opium. Perhaps the Infinite Wisdom of the Blessed One can reveal to the—"

"Rot!" I snarled. "Come on, Crawford, get aft!"

He did not stir a boot. Not a boot. I tell you it iced my spine to see his face.

"You see!" The monk gestured a skinny hand. "Faith. Belief. The soul is empty of desire. You do not desire the drug. You are well and whole, desiring nothing." The monk's eye rolled at me. "You are wondering, my friend, about my English. Many European tongues I know. Many years have I wandered the China coasts. Many souls have I won to the peace of the Eternal Way. Your companion shall know the Pure Light—"

And on he went with a barrage of epigram, a you-are-what-you-believe-you-are philosophy and solemn cant in a voice that cast a spell. He was launching into a parable about the Shogun and the Buddha when his preaching suffered interruption.

"Crawford!" harsh command rasped out; and there stood Mrs. Crawford glaring at us from the bridge. I can imagine what the woman thought, seeing us standing before that yellow robed witch doctor surrounded by a swelter of naked disciples. Her tone was that of an exasperated school teacher bawling out a pair of fools. It shocked a semblance of sanity into the atmosphere.

"Crawford, you come right back up here! Come here at once! The idea—chatting with those filthy beggars! Mr. Tracy, I'm surprised at you! Come here, Crawford! Haven't you any sense?"

Cringing under the scold of her words, like a child caught in mischief, he slunk back to the bridge ladder. Feeling idiotic, I followed. Impervious, ignoring, rebuffing the interruption with utter disregard, the monk went on with his service.

Mrs. Crawford rewarded me with a sneer and a "humph" as I stepped to the bridge, and I could hear her snarling about heathen and fools as she dragged her wretched husband aft. I did not follow them. I waited on the bridge; thinking. Thinking about the monk and Crawford and the smell of the green river. Certainly there was witchery in that monk's voice!

So intent was I on watching him that I scarcely noticed the man who crept around a corner of the deckhouse, mounted to the bridge and stood near me at the rail. He did not notice me. When I turned it was to see a smile that split a porky face in a toothless, scarlet streak. The Rose! And he was glaring at the monk on the forecastle head with eyes flickering like a lizard's tongue. He was glaring with that horrid, jubilant smile; speaking to himself in guttural undertone. I shivered as I heard him growling:

"Those gold beads! Those *gold beads!*"

III

PREMONITION of evil, then, hung thick as mists that cloud a fever swamp. As I picked my way aft I assured myself that here was a bomb—this Tibetan monk and his frenzied disciples—and the skipper was the spark to touch it off. The second that monk was waylaid for his golden prayer beads a riot would run the river boat like fire. Deadly sense of impending trouble did not lure sleep as I crawled into my bunk.

In fact sleep was in no way to be lured. Heat, mosquitoes and bedtime thoughts of a one eyed monk and a devil skipper with a grin like a raw wound contrived to keep me awake and sweating. A horde of pests assaulted me in the stifling dark, won the battle; and I retreated to open deck aft where I could scratch and curse and blow cigaret smoke at the moon.

Up forward the monk and his pilgrims were still going strong. Low murmurous

chanting echoed out of the darkness. Lanterns amidships had winked out, leaving the deck black as a whale hole. Black despite the moon which, faded from blood orange to silver, cruised high. Sitting there in the hot shadows of the after deck, I found myself growing nervous, patting the cold butt of my automatic.

A pair of lascars flitted out of the darkness, gave me a surprised stare and ducked down the after companion. The river boat creaked. The jungles whispered. Wisping smoke and redolent breeze lulled me to a drowse. I was nodding dreamily when a white clad figure looming from shadow startled me from my doze. Approaching with soft footfall, the ghostly figure crossed a feeble patch of moonlight; and I saw with a shock it was Crawford! Instantly I was wide awake, conscious of nothing so much as the tomb like quiet that had fallen over the boat. The racket on the forward deck had ceased.

At first I wondered whether Crawford was walking in his sleep. But he was not. He saw me, shuffled across the deck, crouched at my side. Instead of beginning his usual whine, he reached out for a cigaret. In the flickering light of my extended match his face was simply ghastly. Cheeks from which all color had been drained, lips blue beneath his sunken eyes, it was the face of a corpse. His fingers holding the match trembled. The cigaret shook in his teeth. Then the match burned out, and he was a wraith at my side.

FOR A long time we sat in silence, hissing smoke. Apparently all other life aboard the craft had died. The grave-like quiet was disturbed only by a faint swish of water, a mysterious squeak of straining spar, a rustle from the black jungle, the scrape of Crawford's boots moving restlessly. A sense of unreality assailed me. It was as if the drifting river boat were creeping through nothingness. I did not like that. I did not like the feeling of creeping through nothingness with a wretched drug addict for a companion.

"I've been up forward with the monk."

He spoke suddenly in toneless voice, and I jumped.

"I've been up forward with the monk," he repeated, "and the monk is my friend. He told me I was not a dopey wreck. He told me I was not a failure. He told me I could be what I believed I could be. He told me I could be a lion, or a god!" Crawford was not talking to me. He was not talking to anybody. He was reciting to himself what that one eyed mendicant had told him. "He told me I could be a *god!*"

And before I could say a word, Crawford's cigaret, a tiny comet, arched out over the rail; he rose to his feet and slipped away in the shadows.

He left me feeling as if I had stumbled noisily upon a man in prayer. Emptiness seized my stomach, and I had to fan with my helmet to get a breath. If Mrs. Crawford had seen me then she would certainly have thought me madder than her husband. I went over to the rail and glared down at the river slipping by.

The river boat was inching its way across a stagnant stretch wide as a lake. Streaks of black scum fingered across the water that glistened in the moonlight like ink. Tattered rags of white mist clung on the surface; rags of mist torn from the fogs of feverish vapor that steamed up in the bordering swamps. There was no shore. The channel meandered through a mile of mangrove swamp, poisonous with the stench of rotting vegetation. Dense jungle overran the bottomless muck; *klubi* palm and mangrove tangled with creepers and covered with strange fungi flourished in the tepid water.

I could see the place was alive with crocodiles and snakes. It was quiet as hidden sin out across that scummy backwater—not conducive to cheery meditation. It was still and steamy and evil, so still I could hear the saurians splashing away as the boat crept along; and I was just beginning to think about quinine for

malaria; when a shriek clapped out of the darkness and shattered the silence to little pieces!

IV

CLOSE upon the outcry dinned a furious clamor of howls and screams, the slap of bare feet, the scurry of sandals. Shrill above the tumult rose a voice unmistakably Crawford's. That was enough to cause me to seize my automatic and start me on a witless dash for the bridge. My gallop down the deck became an obstacle race. I was sprinting for the bridge ladder, tripping over all sorts of trash, when I banged my shin on a hatch, sprawled and saw my gun go flying overboard.

Dancing and swearing, I hopped along, bobbed up the bridge ladder, ran for the forward ladder, tripped in a knot of wire cable that grabbed out of the darkness and crashed to my nose. I was up in a second; down in another. Pain melted my ankle, stabbing from torn ligaments. Groaning and out of it, I dragged myself to the bridge rail.

A jamming, wrestling tangle of gleaming, naked bodies swirled over the deck below, Buddhist converts locked in conflict with lascars, and the battle whirling about a central figure easily recognised as the Rose. Face gashed with that horrid smile, eyes sparkling with delight, he was flinging out fists like hammers, knocking the shrieking pilgrims down like so many dummies. And dangling from a knotted paw were the golden prayer beads.

Perched on the peak of the booby hatch, the one eyed monk was commanding his cohorts, exhorting them with soprano screams to get in there and fight. His single eye was burning like a coal. His sarong was ripped to shreds. And he had suffered a nose bleed. He was safe enough, and I looked for Crawford.

There he was, yellow hair tossing in the very midst of the riot. A welt darkened his cheek where some bludgeon had struck, his chin was bleeding, but there was a blaze in his eye and he was fighting like a warrior. He was fighting like a warrior and the monk was urging him on. The monk was screaming at Crawford, telling him he was a lion, a fighter and a god!

I could hardly believe my eyes. Crawford in the thick of a fight!

I yelled at him, but he did not hear. Beating a path through the press, shoving, kicking, he brought up at last to face the Rose. Seeing him, the big skipper let out a shout like a laugh. Crawford's flailing fists bounced off the tattooed chest like white rubber balls. The Rose just laughed, and then he uttered a bellow that echoed to the skies. Crawford had snatched the beads from his paw, flung them over his head straight to the clawing hands of the monk! The skipper's hand swept past his hip; came back with a knife. I saw the flash of the blade, heard Crawford's agonized scream; and I went deathly sick. Crawford was staggering backward, waving a bloody right hand from which the thumb was gone.

The milling scramble swept Crawford and the Rose to the port bow. The monk dropped from his perch, skipped for the rail. Two villainous lascars started after him. They did not touch him. Not they! Instead, I saw them stand in their tracks and howl.

Then a tall figure darted around a corner of the deckhouse below the bridge; went storming into the fight like an avenging angel. Mrs. Crawford! Believe me, I stared and shouted. I shouted wildly; told her to get away. If she heard me, she paid no attention. Gleam of battle was in her eye, a long bamboo pike pole in her hand. Whipping about her with that agile rod, she slashed the natives down like scythed wheat. She was a fury, an Amazon. Hair fell over her face. Her dress ripped to the knee. Malay, lascar, Anamite fled before her weapon. I could hear the song of the pole cutting through the air, the smack as it struck some dusky cheek.

In a trice the woman had cleared way to the bow. *Whack!* Sweeping the rail, whipping across deck, the bamboo pike

lashed the fighting skipper a resounding blow on the ear. Down went the Rose. The pole split its entire length, splinters flying; and Mrs. Crawford stood like the Goddess of War, panting, tucking hair behind her ears, glaring at her husband.

Crawford's face was green, and he stared not at his wife, but at his thumbless hand, at the crimson blotches spreading on the planking at his feet. Mrs. Crawford took a step forward, dropping her splintered pole. I suspect she was about to order him aft, but she did not get a chance. A yellow robe fluttered between Crawford and his wife, as the Buddhist monk stalked to the rail. And with a gesture and a low word, the old mendicant threw himself into the river.

His body struck water with a sodden splash, and away he swam, heading for the black swamps marking shore, his yellow arms splashing through the green slime. Then I cried out aghast. For, slipping past his astonished wife, Crawford vaulted the rail, struck the black water, arms outspread. Green weeds streamed over his face as he came up swimming. Moonlight glistened on his ducking head as he struck out across the steamy river where the mists hung low and the crocodiles floated up from the mud. Smoky cloud obscured the moon. Drifting slowly, the river boat nosed around a bend. When the moon appeared again it was dark and hot and still. The monk and his convert had vanished in the shadows of the swamp.

V

WELL, that was all some years ago, and recollection of the remaining days on the river is not clear. Sore as a sea boil with my sprained ankle, I stayed aft and nursed a grouch. That I know, and this: Mrs. Crawford ran that river boat. Literally, she bossed and bullied the rotten craft to port. Under her lashing tongue and steely chin the crew and skipper went meek as Moses. Especially docile was the Rose.

Yes, the woman ran that floating junk heap down to the Gulf. She made an atrocious skipper and a score of his myrmidons eat out of her hand, and she made them like it. I take off my sun helmet to her!

Now? You can find her running a girls' school up near Oak Openings, if you care to look. It's called the Miss So-and-So's school for European young ladies; takes in all the fever bitten little snob daughters of civil employees and teaches them how to enter a drawing-room. I can swear those young ladies know how, too.

She runs that girls' school and a tea plantation on the side. I know, because I encountered her in the *terai* one season. She was hunting with a party, and looked grimmer than a stiff shirt. She pretended not to recognize me. Thinking perhaps I had mistaken her, I inquired after her at the hotel. Do you know what a young consulate attaché told me about her?

"A sort of man in skirts," is what he said. "Sort of jolly female who would get in there and fight."

I had to chuckle.

And I always wondered what she would have said had I told her about my experience over in Cambodia.

FOUR MONTHS after that river trip I was yellow with fever, and heading out of Siam. Somewhere along the trail near the Siamese-Cambodian border I came upon a little clay walled temple squatting in the sun, a *wat* isolated in a screen of ambient jungle. Gilt pagoda spires glittered against lush green. Bells tinkled sweetly in the drugged quiet.

A fat French inspector going to Pnom Penh was with me. Together we entered the temple. Mystic half light made cool the interior, softening the features of a hundred images that lined the walls—porcelain Buddhas, silver Buddhas, Buddhas of jade and gold. I stared at the idols and at the group of shy monks standing together near the door.

Suddenly a silver chime clinkled. The monks lined up; filed past me to stand before one of the shrines. Sunlight

slanting through the door lighted the path of the worshipers. I could have yelled! First came a one eyed bag of bones, bent as a stunted juniper, who rubbed a string of golden prayer beads. And behind him, bare of foot, shaven of head, yellow robed, beads in hand—Crawford!

Never in the world would I have guessed! Never in the world would I have recognized the arrow straight figure, the well set shoulders, the bronzed bare arm. Never would I have guessed this soldier-like monk to be the wretched, dissolute weakling who had scrabbled and lusted for opium on that stinking river boat four months earlier. I knew him, though, for he raised a hand, and that hand was shorn of the thumb. Otherwise I never would have known. For the shamble had gone from his walk, the beaten droop from his back; and in his eyes I read an ecstasy, a strength, a calm serenity awarded only to him who has cast aside earthly burdens and believes himself a lion, a warrior or a god.

I clutched the fat French inspector's arm so abruptly, he voiced a startled, "*Tiens!*"

"Let's get out of here," I said.

INDIA TYPES

By Harry A. Franck

I

ENGLISH RESIDENTS

A SHIPLOAD of Englishmen, stranded on a deserted coral reef in the far seas, with beef and ale sufficient for immediate wants, would leave behind, at their rescue, at least a cricket ground and a tennis court. As in every land that has known him, the Briton has left his imprint in all India; and, as elsewhere, he has swerved barely a hair's breadth from his inborn customs and prejudices. Though his stay may have exceeded two score years, he is still nothing if not a Briton.

Thanks to the rousing tales of a certain Anglo-Indian novelist, my mental picture of a white resident of India was, on the day of my arrival, a thin, emaciated figure who dragged his listless way from bungalow to government office, awaiting with phlegmatic indifference the fever that was soon to carry him off. Among the robust, full cheeked colonial officials I encountered in every district, from Madura to Delhi, I had utterly failed to discover this preconceived type. Now and then a frail youth, who should never have slipped the maternal apron string, lagged weakly forward to assert that the zone below the Tropic of Cancer was no fit dwelling place for man—and shortly thereafter was carried off to the hills to die of too much sunlight, instead of wasting out in the germ laden atmosphere of a London counting house. An occasional soldier of fortune, too, in whom the effete atmosphere of the Orient had changed the love for tennis into a devotion to burning arrack, or who had abandoned the ease of the club to spend his energies in adjusting the domestic disagreements of half a dozen brown skinned spouses, startled one with his gaunt and sallow air. But these were exceptional. The robust colonial was everywhere, and early forced upon the observing the conviction that the Briton who departs his native isle a man, and does not leave his manhood behind him, may pursue his life's work as fearlessly in India as among the chill winds of his natal valleys.

OLEMAN HATTIE

As sheep to the cattleman, so Siwashes to the sheepherder

By JAMES STEVENS

GURNEY sat on his feedyard gate at sundown. He was perched far back on the flat top board. His forearms rested on his legs and his hands dangled down. Blue smoke curled up sluggishly from a half forgotten cigaret that drooped between limp fingers. The weariness of a hard day of riding was passing from him. Content drowsed into his heart.

Behind him the young stock munched hay. The sounds of eating and of the soft tramping of hoofs were music to Gurney's ears. To the left he could see the land of his deep valley ranch where it made an easy rise toward the sheer black cliffs that fanned away from the narrow throat of Eagle Cañon. This land was black now, except for streaks and drifts of snow; against it the rails of his corrals were faint gray lines.

The haystack, narrowed by winter feeding, was a pale yellow column against the dark shadows of the rimrock cliffs. Light gray woodsmoke was drifting, in lazy puffs and ravelings, from the kitchen chimney of the ranch-house. The two hands had started supper.

Soon the twilight would sort of soothe down over all; then it would be good to go in to the crackle of fire and the mellow shine of lamplight . . .with T-bones bubbling and sputtering in the skillet . . . coffee steaming . . . biscuits browning in the oven . . . the old pooch barking outside, or a yearling bawling, or a horse nickering . . . the two hands gabbing about times in town . . . all hunkydory . . . all—Gurney blinked his eyes. Christopher! He had forgotten Luke Spagget!

Gurney stirred uneasily on his perch. straightened up and tossed his dead cigaret to the ground. There it was again,

the damn' lower country shoving on him. Sheep again. Sheep, in the person of old Luke.

"Roll away trouble! Get th' hell!" Gurney's mind said that, to cap a picture of trouble being cracked over the ribs with the butt end of a quirt.

Then he settled down to enjoy his sunset until the last flicker of red should die above the rimrock cliffs.

The Western sky turned from blue green to smoky rose, then to the dull glow of smoldering fire. Gurney, gazing as in a dream, saw a black speck appear against the dull red light above the black cliff on the left Eagle Cañon. The speck lengthened, as if it were growing out of the rimrock; slowly it rose; then four thin black lines moved under it. Gurney came to life.

"Reservation Siwashes," he said aloud. "Sure sign of spring. Yes, sir!"

Some reservation family was on *travois*, coming out from the spring wool picking. In a few moments a cavalcade was moving along the cliff rim in single file. The buck, the head of the family, was in the lead. The ponies of three squaws trailed him, each one dragging its two *travois* poles bound together under a bulging load. Five ponies behind the women carried smaller figures, the papooses of the family.

Back of them rode another squaw. Gurney knew that she was the *oleman*, the grandmother of the family. Back of her was a file of five packhorses trailed by two boys on ponies.

THE FIGURES against the red glow were as black as the rimrock face below them, all colors of horses and dress being blotted out. But each shape was clearly silhouetted. Gurney could see every switch of a pony's tail, every move of its legs. Even the thin slanting lines of the *travois* poles showed, above and below their lumpy loads, against the dull fire in the sky.

Gurney's eyes never left the cavalcade as it filed across the sunset and down the slope of the cliff rim toward the hills. The sight made a stir of emotion in his heart. It was a feeling that up there the spirit of the wild Oregon country had taken body, was living and moving. The Indians were the country itself, as much so as the rimrock cliffs which opened, fanlike, from the cañon's mouth. The feeling was an old one with him. Once he had tried to explain it to Luke Spagget. He had succeeded only in breaking an old friendship. Since then Gurney had kept such feelings to himself.

The shapes of the Indians and the ponies blurred into the bunchgrass and sagebrush on the hills' ridges and the snow in the draws, as the cavalcade filed past the point where the rimrock merged with the valley slope. The buck in the lead headed the file into a descent straight for the ranch-house.

Not until the *travois* poles were dragging past his haystack did Gurney recognize the family. Even in that distance and dim light Gurney could see the savage hatred with which the old squaw in the rear was regarding him. Gurney did not mind that look from *oleman* Hattie. He knew why she regarded all white men as panthers regarded them. She was an admiration of his. She was unconquered, untamed, true *lemolo*. She was all native, was *oleman* Hattie.

As the cavalcade approached, Gurney glanced nervously toward the ranch-house. He hoped Luke Spagget would have sense enough to stay in the kitchen. But the man was an old fool, a fool born, Gurney felt again the resentment that had made him greet Spagget so shortly when the old man rode in at sundown. He had told him he was busy, to put up his horse and go to the house for supper. Hadn't let him say a word about what he was after. Gurney knew well enough—hay for the starving sheep over on the Hawes ranch. Well, what Spagget would get was a T-bone supper. Maybe not even that—not if he came out now and made a show of his old unreasoning hate of the Siwashes, Gurney vowed.

He slid down from the gate and stood ready for a greeting. It would have to be

spoken in the regular half joshing cowman to Siwash style or the Indians wouldn't savvy it. They were slaves of custom.

II

"*KLAHOWYAN*, Isaac Spotted Tail!" Gurney called, as the buck hauled up. "Welcome to our city. How's things on the reservation? How's the fambly? See *oleman* Hattie's still a-kickin'!"

The file halted. The youngest of the papooses, not a year old, set up a terrific squawling from the bonds that held him securely to his pony's back. Not one of the young squaws looked around at him. They all sat like statues, waiting for the buck to conclude his business with the white man.

"*Klahowyan*, Gurney." Isaac Spotted Tail soberly made the peace sign. "We makeum good. How you makeum? How cattle? You ketchum good winter?" These polite queries solemnly and ceremoniously made, the buck's tone became soft and coaxing. "*Potlatch* tobacco, Gurney."

"No tobacco," said Gurney. If Isaac Spotted Tail were given tobacco, he would beg for everything else on the ranch upon which his fancy lit. "Tobacco ain't good for Indians, Isaac. Don't you know it brings on smallpox? You want to die of smallpox, Isaac?"

The tobacco refused, Isaac Spotted Tail ignored the questions and moved on to the next idea in his mind.

"We come pickum wool dead sheep. You gotum dead sheep, Gurney?"

Wrath flared in Gurney at the suggestion that he might have been wintering sheep, but he knew that no insult was intended.

"No, Isaac," he said calmly. "I ain't never run sheep, I ain't wintered any, and I never will. Don't like the smell."

"Me likeum," said Isaac Spotted Tail. "Bad winter. Plenty sheep die. Me come pickum wool. Where ketchum?"

Gurney cogitated over what little he knew about the sheep ranches in the lower country. He wasn't any mine of information on the subject. He thought of the Hawes ranch. The winter had simply slaughtered sheep there, according to report. Just then the hoarse voice of Luke Spagget sounded at his elbow.

"Friends of your'n, Gurney? They stoppin' with you tonight?"

"Yeah, they're friends of mine." Gurney spoke evenly, ignoring the sarcasm of the questions. "They'll prob'ly camp down by the creek. They want to know where's the best wool pickin', the most dead sheep. You ought to be able to tell 'em, Luke."

"Dead sheep!"

Spagget's voice struck a high, nervous note on the words. Hostility vanished from his eyes. The wrinkles around them widened. They stared, dully, miserably.

"Dead sheep!" Spagget spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"Where ketchum dead sheep?" Isaac Spotted Tail said. "Where pickum wool?"

Spagget turned to Gurney. The light gray of twilight was drifting over the cavalcade now, over the two white men. In it the old man seemed to see a ghostly vision. He spoke to Gurney, his voice quivering.

"Old-timer, you never see the like! Dead sheep! Thousands on 'em! Yes, sir, by grab, about all's left of the old Senator's herds is carcasses and wool. What I mainly come to see you about, Gurney. To beg for some hay for what of the pore woolies that's left. But never mind now—Dead sheep! Why, we couldn't skin the pelts off fast enough this winter! Couldn't find fence room to hang 'em on, fin'ly. It's a dang, stinkin', rotten shame—the pore, dead sheep. Rows on 'em! Stacks on 'em! Piles! Mountains!"

"Where findum? Where ketchum?"

It was the shrill, cracked voice of *oleman* Hattie, the grandmother. She had ridden her pony up to the side of Isaac Spotted Tail, She leaned forward in her saddle, her black eyes peering eagerly at Spagget. Even in the dimming

light a thousand wrinkles showed in her face.

"Where ketchum dead sheep?" her cracked voice cried again.

LUKE SPAGGET had turned morose and silent after his outburst. He stared down the valley toward the lower country, his back on the Indians. Then he looked down, as Gurney took a stick and drew in the dirt a map of the route to the Hawes sheep ranch. When it was done, old Spagget spoke again.

"Go on and pick yer wool," he said grimly, addressing Isaac Spotted Tail. "It's a reg'lar wool mine there, but look out fer trouble. The ranch is hoodooed—*mesache*—understand? Ranch boss young fool. Crazy. *Tyee pelton*. He don't know it's a range rule Indians can pickum wool dead sheep. He don't know that or a dang thing else. He makeum trouble—*kadena*."

"Yeah," said Gurney, after an amazed look at Spagget. Was the old fool trying to make up with him by being friendly to the Indians? Gurney went on, speaking to the *oleman*. "Better shoo-fly that outfit, Hattie."

"Plenty sheep. Big wool. We pickum," she insisted.

Isaac Spotted Tail was uneasy.

"Shut up!" he said to the *oleman*.

She obeyed him, but she still stared at the diagram Gurney had drawn in the dirt.

Gurney's two young hands had been listening to the confab, and now one of them horned in.

"Why don't you send 'em down to the Oakes ranch?" he asked Gurney. "Not so many dead woolies there, but some, and old Oakes won't say a word to the Siwashes pickin' 'em."

"Where Oakes?" Isaac Spotted Tail asked, with interest.

Gurney mapped the location of that ranch for him.

"Plenty herders?" asked Isaac.

"Uh-huh," said the young cowboy, grinning. "Plenty whisky. Plenty cards."

"Me go Oakes," stated Isaac Spotted Tail with animation.

"We go big wool!" shrilled *oleman* Hattie. "Plenty lum, plenty stud-pokum no damn' good! Go pickum big wool! Big money!"

"*Tyee pelton*," said Isaac, not looking at her. "No good."

"*Kwass!*"

The *oleman* shrieked the "coward!" into Isaac's face. Gurney felt a hot thrill at her cry. There was the spirit of the old West, of the old Indian, the true native of the land, finding voice again. The *lemolo!* He chuckled as he saw the young buck, Isaac Spotted Trail, shrinking before old Hattie's contempt. But Isaac's position had to be maintained. He lifted his quirt threateningly and pointed to the rear of the cavalcade.

"Shut up, *oleman! Klatawa!*"

Hattie was obedient again. Her pony's *travois* poles dragged away. Isaac's pride and dignity returned.

"Makeum camp your place?" he asked Gurney. The rancher nodded. "*Kalahowyan*," said Isaac Spotted Tail to all the white men.

They stood and watched as the cavalcade moved on. The three young squaws never looked at them, never looked back at the papooses bound on ponies behind. The biggest of the papooses, a three year old, stared woodenly. The youngest, the mere infant, still squawled with amazing power. *Oleman* Hattie was looking at him with approval as she rode by. She was no no doubt thinking that some day there would be a buck with fine lungs.

"*Klahowyan, oleman* Hattie," said Gurney, as the *travois* poles dragged past.

Her answer was one fierce, sidelong glance. The cavalcade wound on toward the creek bottom below the barn and corrals. *Oleman* Hattie was a squat, muffled body on her pony. The loose folds of the heavy blanket that covered her legs swayed with the motion of the pony's flanks. Hattie's kerchiefed head blurred into the twilight. The *travois* poles and their loads melted into the dark-

ness of the willow and cottonwood thickets along the creek.

"Hope they don't go over and tangle with young Hawes. He's bad enough already. Done enough dang dirt and harm."

Gurney said nothing in reply. He and Spagget were pegging along toward the kitchen door of the ranch-house. He had nothing to say. He had offered hospitality. He couldn't go any further, not with his precious, thinning stacks of hay on Spagget's mind. It was hard, though, to hold off from a man you had camped with on so many lonesome ranges.

"It wasn't altogether the hay I come about, Gurney. I figgered—maybe—"

Gurney's hand was on the doorknob. For an instant he hesitated. He knew by the tone of the voice what appeal was in Spagget's old eyes. But his hand turned the knob. He wouldn't yield. He stepped inside the lamplighted kitchen, and Luke Spagget pegged slowly behind him.

SUPPER was over. All through the meal Luke Spagget had never looked up from his plate, but kept his head bowed over so that the lamplight made a flush under his thin, gray wisps of hair.

The corners of his mouth were pulled down, as he chewed away, so that the wrinkles of his face were drawn into tight lines under the grizzled stubble of beard.

The meal done, Spagget hitched his chair around to a place close to the stove. He was tilted back in his chair now, his feet curled behind the front legs. His bony hands hung nervelessly over his knees. He stared at them morosely, silently, waiting for Gurney's two men to finish washing the dishes and leave for the bunkhouse.

Gurney had excused himself, and he now appeared to be engrossed in a blueprint that was spread out before him on the cleared table. Had to put in right off for his grazing permits, he had said. Every so often he would look up and address a query to one of the hands. How much hay was on the homestead ranch? How much on the school section? What would *they* figure, now? The two hands argued warmly over their guesses, and Gurney seemed to listen intently. But his mind was actually on the gray, bent, morose figure in the chair by the stove.

There were the old times, the old times together, when this starved old sheepherder was as limber and tough a buckaroo as ever sat in a saddle—and as true a friend. The old times, the time for instance, when they were both riding for Miller and Lux, down in Southern Oregon. The old Dirty Plate outfit. The time when the two of them were running at the head of a stampede. The picture flashed up vividly in Gurney's mind. His madly galloping roan shoving a front leg to the knee in a badger hole. A smash to the ground. Staring helplessly through a red blur at the longhorns. The roar of a six-shooter in his ears. Three cow brutes down—the stampede split—roaring by—coming to, his head in Luke Spagget's arm . . .

A long time ago. Funny how things could change, how easy two friends could bust up. There was another picture in Gurney's mind. The two of them on a tear at a freighting station down on the Deschutes River. A squaw passing them, flashing them the look of hate she had for all white men. Spagget swearing at her, the squaw swearing back, until Gurney interfered. An argument. Spagget calling him a Siwash lover. Himself calling Spagget a born fool who could never learn to savvy the Oregon country. Then the battle, a miserable dogfight.

Two old *tilicums*—hell, it was too tough to think about. Gurney wondered if old Luke had recognized *oleman* Hattie as the squaw who had caused their split-up. Probably not. But she had certainly recognized him, though she hadn't given a sign. That *lemolo* look of hers for all white men, ever the same, and with good reason.

THE DISHES were done. The two hands left the bunkhouse. The kitchen door slammed. Gurney shoved the blueprint aside.

"Doin' a lot of figurin' now," he said.

"Start grazin' soon as the snow's off for sure. Cattle buyer'll be around in about a week, too."

"Yeah?"

Spagget's hoarse voice was tense and querulous. He obviously wasn't interested. He fidgeted his hands, cleared his throat a couple of times and worked his mouth with a convulsive movement. At last his voice broke forth.

"Dang if I can stand it much longer, Gurney! I'm plum goin' crazy!"

"A year's all you been herdin' sheep, ain't it, Luke?" said Gurney. "Usually takes a herder a lot longer before he goes off his bat, don't it?"

"I might of knowed you'd start ta'ntin' me, Gurney!"

"I wasn't aimin' to ta'nt you," protested Gurney. "Christopher, you *are* a sheepherder, ain't you?"

"An old man's got to work sommers." Spagget's flash of resentment was gone. He slumped down in his chair. "I've had more dang troubles, Gurney," he complained. "The most miser'ble cussed year I ever lived. And the sheep a-dyin' —the dead sheep—they're a plum hauntin' me. I figgered maybe—well, it's been ten year since we—and I'm gettin' dang old—"

His voice faltered away. There was the timid, helpless look of the old in his glance at Gurney.

Gurney was moved, touched to the heart. An impulse to throw all caution and restraint aside burned through him. The old bitter promises to himself that this friendship was dead, forever over, were forgotten. He hauled his chair around the table and sat close to Spagget.

"You tell me all about it, old-timer," he said simply. "Tell all you damn' please."

"I knowed you was all right, Gurney." Spagget said that, sighed, and then his mind centered on his own troubles again. "The most miser'ble year of my life, Gurney. And me a-startin' it with only the idy of gettin' peace, comfort and health for my old age. That idy—and then up comes young Mr. Talbot Hawes, the sugar plum of his daddy's heart. I could almost wish the dirty Siwashes would tangle with him and massacre him! The idy of peace, comfort and health with Mr. Talbot Hawss around!"

"You mean young Hawes, the Senator's son?" asked Gurney.

"Yes, sir—Mr. Talbot Hawss."

"I met him—once. Thought he could get familiar. Called me brother, just once." Gurney spoke with all of the cowman's contempt for the sheepman.

"I had to work sommers, Gurney." Spagget's voice was pathetic with self pity again. "You can see plain enough I ain't nothin' of the man you used to know. It was some more'n a year ago I saw my buckarooin' days was over and done. I was plum down. From all the docs could figger out, I had all the innard troubles that ever was, and all flavored with the old rheumatiz. I'd never saved nothin'. Had to work sommers."

"You *might* have tried me, Luke."

"YEAH. But I had some pride left then, Gurney." Spagget's tone was bitter. "Even felt too proud to turn sheepherder at first. Went over the mountains to the Coast. Then, by grab, I *was* miser'ble. You ain't never been out from among these pinnacles of our'n, Gurney!"

His voice shook under a rush of feeling.

"You don't know what it is to be shut in among hills that are all alike, all one color, the black green of the big firs, and always a dull sky overhead, pale and dim with smoke or fog. I learnt something of what you meant about savvyin' this country then, Gurney. I felt like I'd give anything to come back to the open country—turn Siwash even! Well, I knowed I could still herd sheep, foller a band of woolies around, so I come back—fer that."

"You ought to tried me, old-timer," Gurney said again, miserably.

"No. All I asked fer was the country, peace, comfort and health fer my old age. So I come back and went out to the

Hawss ranch. I figgered if I went sheepherdin' for a Senator, at least that would be somethin'. Little did I know! Mr. Talbot Hawss! He's nigh killed me—and now it's drivin' me crazy—the dead sheep—the pore, dang, dead sheep—starved and froze, stretched out on the range, waitin' fer the Siwashes to pick their wool!"

"Looky here, Luke!" Gurney snapped the words.

"Yeah?"—apathetically.

"You're goin' to ditch that sheep outfit and come back to cattle, where you belong. No wonder you feel crazy and half dead, no wonder you're so low and pessimistic—you, a buckaroo all your life, turnin' sheepherder, like a Bosky or a Mex. You got to work sommers, you say. Well, here's your place. Right here, and right now. I need a cook and handy man on this ranch, if anybody ever did. You're goin' back to your Hawss ranch tonight, leadin' one of my cayuses, and tomorrer mornin' you ride the cayuse back, to stay with yer old *tilicum* for keeps! That's you, old-timer!"

"By grab!" Old Luke Spagget was sitting up as straight in his chair as he had ever sat in the saddle. Something like the old hell was shining in his eyes. "By grab, Gurney! You mean it? Bygones is bygones?"

"You betcha." Gurney had no more orations to make. "You betcha. Luke. We're too far along for such foolishness."

"By grab! Dang my hide!" There was a grin all over Spagget's face. "Dang if it don't feel good to—well, just to *feel* good again! By grab, Gurney!" He paused and chuckled. "Wonder what Mr. Talbot Hawss will say to this? Serve him right, all the misery I've had on his account. He'll prob'bly call hisself licked at last and turned his whole dang ranch over to your Isaac Spotted Tail and fambly."

"What about this feller, anyhow?" Gurney really wished to know, and besides, he wanted something to shy away on from his emotions.

Old Luke solemnly asked for the makings. As he twirled and licked the cigaret he was much like the young buckaroo he used to be, Gurney thought. He could almost imagine that this old man humped up beside the kitchen stove was a tough cow hand in his prime, squatting beside a camp-fire, grinning to himself as he got ready to spring something rich and deep.

"Bawl away, old dogie," said Gurney, just as he used to say it.

IV

"MR. TALBOT HAWSS was a ejicated young gent. Got all his ejication in Harvard or Yurrop, or some sech places." Spagget drawled out the words in his old-time, dry, yarning style. "He is a middle sized, chunky, thick necked, snippy spoken young gent. His paw, the Senator, sent him out to take charge of the ranch just after I went to work there. He entered our lambin' camp togged up in choke bore pants with pearl buttons on 'em and English boots and spurs with no rowels. Worst of all, he carried a lariat on his saddle—prob'ly, it was soon intimated, to hang hisself with if it should turn out he couldn't reform sŏmethin' sometime."

"Just what I'd 'a' figured," said Gurney.

"Yep. Well, first thing it was a kind of mutual sizin' up betwixt him and the hands; they all begin to get acquainted; and in about ten minutes he was informin' the assembly that his name was not young Hawss, as the hands had started callin' him, because the Senator was always known as "Old Hawss" on the ranch, but *Mister* Hawes. They was a flock of Tennesseans with the outfit, and they argied they couldn't say his name otherwise than Hawss, that no Tennessean alive could. So he told 'em they could call him Mr. Talbot. The wreck they made of 'Talbot' I leave to yer imagination, Gurney. The question of ettiket was settled, fin'ly, by him agreein' to be known as Mr. Hawss, which he was called from then on by all and sundry.

"Next, the Senator's son and heir ordered lambin' stopped until he was fully acquainted with the sheep and the workin's of the outfit. The foreman sarcastically invited him to stop the lambin' hisself, if he had that much power over nacher, and then he offered to resign. Mr. Hawss blushed and laughed the matter off. Lambin' went on."

"You *must* be a-stretchin' it, Luke!"

"By grab, I ain't. You can begin to see the kind of *tyee* Isaac Spotted Tail's got to deal with, if he goes wool pickin' on the Hawss ranch. But that wasn't the worst.

"Mr. Hawss worked his imagination to the limit, tryin' to reform lambin'. He tried to figger out a way to make each ewe have one good lamb, instead of twins, triplets, or none at all. He tried to reform the time honored style of markin' lambs, and done it so well that the summer bands was full of *enteros*, accountin' fer a lot of our winter troubles with lambs comin' out of season and ewes dyin'. The lambin' mussed up as much as he could muss it. Mr. Hawss then turned his attentions to what he called the social life of the camp.

"The herd boss had put his foot down agin any kind of gamblin'. Mr. Hawss declared that the boys should have all and any kind of fun they wanted, to ease the tejun of their barren existence, and they should gamble all they dang pleased. If gamblin' had been allowed, he'd gone agin it, of course.

"Well, the camp went poker wild. One night the shearin' boss was caught with four tens in his undershirt, and in the scuffle that follered two of the herders was knifed. The knifer was tied in a wool sack and drug behind a hoss until he was half dead. The next mornin' the shearers quit as one man. And there was me, Gurney, all the time, lookin' for peace comfort and health for my old age. By grab!"

"Are you *sure* you ain't stretchin' it?" Gurney asked incredulously.

"If I am," protested Spagget, lighting his dead cigaret, "may I be condemned to pick wool with the Indians from now to summer! But I ain't told the worst.

"No other shearers could be got, and the sheep went unshorn until they'd shed half their wool. What was left was low grade truck. It was tough on the Senator, but he still let young Mr. Hawss have a free hand.

"Next, Mr. Hawss turned his attentions to the range boss. Ordered him, all of a sudden, to sow the home ranch to barley—seven hun'ered acres. The range boss, a sawed off Slovak named Hrbacek, tried to explain that the grain ground had already been sowed to wheat last fall, but he was cut off, told to shut up and obey orders. So that was what he done.

"You know without tellin' that the wheat was scratched out so it burnt up. The barley kills out, of course. Winter comes. There is only last year's stacks, hardly enough for a mild, short winter. And you know this winter, Gurney."

"I've seen homesteaders do about as bad," said Gurney, shaking his head, "but even so, I can hardly swaller it."

"It'd be funny if it didn't seem so like a ghas'ly dream." That high, tense note sounded in old Luke's voice again. "The winter—the dead sheep! The rows and stacks of 'em! God, Gurney, the pore, dang sheep!"

His hands shook so that his cigaret dropped, unnoticed, to the floor.

"How the winter hit 'em! A freeze in October, blizzards the beginnin' of November, blizzards again in early December, thaws in January till the ground was clear, then more blizzards, and snow till it's four feet deep all over! Then was when the herd boss began to yell for hay. He was told to go buy some. 'Where th' hell—" he started to ask, then he bawled, 'Write 'er out! I'm gone!' Mr. Hawss begin to look sick then hisself. He put a Mex in to run the place, stuck his tail between his laigs, and hit fer town.

"You wouldn't hate sheep so much, if you'd seen 'em die as I've seen 'em since then, Gurney. First, I was disgusted with the critters. They ain't got guts, like cattle and hosses has. They won't

fight fer life. Do jest the oppisite. They lay down in the snow, curl up and *make* themselves die. You pick one up, and down he flops and curls up agin. It fin'ly gets you. You go to feelin' fer the critters. That's why I've stuck and been seein' 'em through, as well as I could. That's why I fin'ly swallered all my pride and rode over here as a buckaroo turned sheepherder, Gurney, to beg you fer hay. The pore, dang, dead sheep—"

FOR A moment there was silence in the kitchen, except for the crackle of fire in the stove. Old Luke worked his lips as he stared with unblinking eyes at the vision that haunted him. A hoarse murmur reached Gurney's ears.

"Dead sheep! The scads of 'em!"

"You're forgettin' old-timer, you're quittin' it all," Gurney said gently. "You're ridin' back here tomorrow, Luke."

Spagget rose stiffly to his feet. A wild glare shone in the old buckaroo's eyes, as he solemnly shook his head.

"Quit? That's what they all done, Gurney!" he cried. "Didn't I tell you I'd learnt to savvy the country? Why, I'd be a skunk to quit, Gurney; you know it yourself. Quittin' an outfit, leavin' it in the hole, was the last thing you'd ever do!"

"But that is a sheep outfit," argued Gurney.

"Maybe so, Gurney. I used to feel the same way. But I've seen 'em die, and I think now of the Siwashes pullin' the wool off the pore, dead critters. What's left needs a lot of lookin' after, with nothin' but straw to eat, and little of that." Old Luke's face had become grimmer with every word, his voice quieter. "No, Gurney, she's no use. Lord knows how I want to take you up, but I can't. The reg'lar sheep hands, they've all quit—all but me and the Mex and a couple of Slovaks. I ain't no man if I leave an outfit in a shape like that. She's a sheep outfit, but she's mine. I reckon I'll mosey on back. There ain't no chance for that hay, Gurney?"

"I'd as soon butcher my yearlin's to keep coyotes from starvin'," said Gurney shortly. "But that's nothin' agin you, old-timer," he added quickly. "What I said for you goes any time you want it."

"Reckon I'll mosey on," said Spagget wearily. "Thanks, and—and good night."

He shook hands, put on his hat and coat and stumped away to the door. He paused there, his hand on the knob.

"Maybe I've learnt some of the savvy of the country you ain't learnt yet, Gurney. But we're not goin' to fight over sheep like we did over Siwashes. Sheep ain't coyotes, though, Gurney. You can feel sorry for 'em—"

GURNEY stood in the kitchen door and watched Spagget and his horse disappear in the shadows below the Indian camp. Various emotions were struggling in his heart. Somehow old Luke had managed to make him feel mean, ashamed. That feeling warred with his resentment against the suggestion that he should let some of his precious hay go to feed sheep, which were to him parasites of the range. And there was the miserable feeling that he held the treasure of a renewed friendship in his hands, only to toss it away again, leaving himself lonelier than ever.

He stepped outside and looked up the valley at his cliffs. They were more black, kingly and towering than ever, under the light of a high, full moon. Wild and changeless, the masses of rock looked back on him as impassively as they had looked on the Indians, the natives of the land, thousands of years ago. Before them how puny and transitory were the quarrels of sheepmen and cattlemen over grass. The country was sufficient to itself—but no—there was the Indian camp.

There was *oleman* Hattie. The wickiup door was opened wide, and Gurney could see her in front of the fire. Her hawklike profile was toward him. A blanket was over her shoulders. Not a motion of life was about her. She might have been sculped from the rimrock of the cliffs. The figures of the young squaws moved

about her, as they carried in stuff from the *travois* loads. Somewhere in the shadows Isaac Spotted Tail was resting on his blankets. But *oleman* Hattie was the ruling spirit of the camp. The *lemolo*, the untamed spirit of the country, which was in her, imposed its domination on the family. That was the country's power over its natives.

Watching her, all the white life and enterprises of the country seemed to Gurney to be remote, immaterial. The struggle in his heart subsided, He felt about old Luke Spagget and young Mr. Talbot Hawes as he knew the Indians felt about them. Standing there in the moonlight, the old black cliffs above him, below him the motionless figure of *oleman* Hattie outlined against the wickiup fire, Gurney felt himself an alien to his own race. He gloried in it now.

He was not so sure of himself the next morning, however, when he saw Isaac Spotted Tail lead his calvacade up a draw that headed him for the Hawes ranch. A bitter wind was blowing and gray drifts of clouds in the West promised snow. Gurney's mind persisted in dwelling on the sheep that would die in another storm, and freeze. His heart yearned toward old Luke. He had hoped that *oleman* Hattie would win her point over Isaac, but her triumph somehow didn't give him much of a thrill.

V

THERE was still snow on the ground the evening the cattle buyer arrived, but the sun was shining clearly over Eagle Cañon and there was a warm stir in the air. Gurney and the buyer went over the young stock, while the two hands prepared supper. Gurney had ordered them to make it a fancy affair. After the meal business would be put aside while the buyer told them of the affairs of the outside world.

The two men were sitting on the feedyard gate, both engrossed in the figures that covered a pad of paper on the buyer's knee, when a hoarse yell sounded from behind them. They twisted quickly in its direction, Luke Spagget had ridden up at a gallop. He reared his horse to a stop like a young buckaroo performing at a circus roundup. His hat was cocked on the back of his head, his wrinkled face was the color of a frost bitten apple, and his eyes were wild.

"Hey, Gurney!" he yelled, as if he were a mile away. "Have you seen 'em, Gurney? Did they come back by yore place?"

"Seen who? What are you talkin' about?" Gurney exclaimed

"Dang!" Spagget's Adam's apple jerked up and down as he made a desperate effort to calm himself. "Dang if I ain't had them sheep and all so on my mind I fergit the whole world don't know about it! Isaac Spotted Tail's outfit's the one I'm after. *Oleman* Hattie in partickler. She's plugged Mr. Hawss, He's deader'n skinned mutton."

"Dead!" the buyer gasped. "You don't mean it!"

"What happened, Luke?" asked Gurney quietly.

"What's the use of askin' questions?" snapped Spagget. "I tell you the boss is dead, killed by the dirty Siwashes. Are you goin' to help me go after the killers, or ain't you? If you're white men, you are!"

"Ca'm down, Luke, ca'm down," said Gurney, still resting easily on his perch. "I've heard all about this young Hawes from you, and I know all about the Indians. They don't shoot without good reason. If they'd see us chasin' 'em with guns they'd figure that was the best reason that ever was. The world ain't burnin' up. You got time to explain yourself."

"All I know of the killin' is from Hrbacek, the range boss," said Spagget, obviously irritated by Gurney's demand. "The dang furriner, he didn't know any better'n to be tickled. Never knowed when he'd been insulted. Well, he'd been out gassin' with the Siwashes, tryin' to make up to one of Isaac's squaws, like as not, when the first thing he knowed Mr. Hawss hove down, just back from town, choke bore pants and all."

Old Luke almost grinned. He was relishing the scene in spite of himself.

"'Pears like he tore into Hrbecek for all he was worth," the old man went on. "Told him he was a scound'el and I don't know what else, for lettin' the Siwashes steal the wool off his dead sheep. He's already lost too much. He needed this wool and, after all his hard luck he wasn't goin' to see it stole.

"The Slovak tried to explain it wasn't stealin', that it was a law of the sheep range that the Siwashes could pick the sheep that had died every winter; but Mr. Hawss riled himself up worse than ever, declared that Hrbacek was in with the Indian thieves hisself and to get the hell away and he'd settle with him after he was done with the Indians.

"The range boss moved off to a safe distance, he said, and then Mr. Hawss turned on Isaac Spotted Tail. Isaac pertended he hadn't understood what had been said. He stuck out his hand.

"'*Klahowyan*, Hawss. Me Isaac Spotted Tail.'

"A Siwash callin' him Hawss made the young feller wild'rn ever. He shook his fist in Isaac's face and fairly screamed for him to get the dang squaws off his range. Isaac told him to go getum hisself. And that's what Mr. Hawss tried to do.

"He rushed out and commenced to bawl at one of the young squaws, but of course she acted like she didn't understand and went on pickin' her dead sheep. Mr. Hawss grabbed her by the shoulder. Hrbacek said he shook his quirt at her. Maybe. Anyhow, whatever he done was his last act. For *oleman* Hattie let out a war cry, hobbled over to the wickiup, hauled out a rifle, and showered down. About a second later Hrbacek was ridin' away from there. By grab!"

SPAGGET had become excited again, and now he stopped for breath. The cattle buyer, his face white and his eyes bugging, was motionless and speechless on his perch. Gurney spoke, his voice even and low.

"You know what that meant to *oleman* Hattie when your young boss grabbed the squaw, don't you, Luke?"

"Why—dang it, no!"

"She had a sister marry a squawman. No Indian was ever a shadow to him when it come to beatin' a woman. Hattie fin'ly shot him. There wasn't even a warrant swore out for her. There was people who understood the Indians in the old days, Luke."

"I always knowed you was for 'em!" Spagget's hoarse voice was hot and shrill with wrath. "You ought to go live on the reservation, you admire Siwashes so well! By grab, you had!"

"We had that out once before," snapped Gurney. "But pin me down to it, and I'll say I'd take Siwashes to sheep any time—or to sheepmen."

"By grab, you ain't white!" The old man's face was a flame with passion. "Gurney, I come on him in the snow. It was beat all around him, where he'd been kickin' and tossin'—and snow was on his face, snow spotted with black blood—snow and blood—white and black—and you're fer the black, Gurney! By grab, I'll chase 'em alone, and I ain't got no gun!"

"No you won't," said the cattle buyer, finding speech at last. "I'll—"

What he would do was never said, for just then all eyes were fixed on a cavalcade that arched out of a draw just above the ranch-house and turned along the hillside toward the towering cliff on the left. Isaac Spotted Tail, in the lead, raised his hand, making the peace sign to the white men below.

Gurney's hand answered the gesture. He knew that the hearts of the Indians were innocent. The wool was theirs by right, by the law of the range. A white man had attempted to break that law. He had offered violence to one of the family. *Oleman* Hattie had shot him. They had done nothing wrong, according to their code. Mr. Hawes was the offender. He was dead. That was all.

Gurney's thoughts were rapidly cut off by the sight of Luke Spagget whirling his

horse toward the cavalcade. The damned old fool, had he lost his mind? Or had he lied about not having a gun? Gurney leaped to the ground and ran for his own horse, which was standing with the cattle buyer's, nearby. He flung the reins over its neck and swung into the saddle. Old Luke had a start on him, but Gurney was astraddle the fastest cow horse in the country. Gurney gave him the quirt.

Up the slope Spagget and his horse made a jiggering black sploch against the snow on the ground, the yellow of bunchgrass and the gray of sagebrush. He was riding up the slope at a slant, to cut off the head of the file. Isaac Spotted Tail looked around once, then straight ahead.

The squaws paid no heed to the approaching rider, except *oleman* Hattie. She turned in her saddle and stared straight at him. Gurney saw her hand reaching for the rifle slung at her pony's side. His horse lunged under him as the quirt struck again.

He was gaining, gaining fast. Relief swept over him in a cool wave. He'd head the old fool off before any harm was done. Head him off—but, what the hell! By Christopher, Hattie had swung out of the file, jerked her pony's head around, and was riding down the slope, heading for Spagget!

Gurney swung his quirt again. He felt the muscles and nerves under him strain to their utmost power. He bowed himself low over the streaming mane. The big black sploch in front of him was taking on a plain shape. By Christopher, old Luke was slowing down, waiting for *oleman* Hattie to come to him. Ten more lunges of his horse, and Gurney was riding between the two old-timers, the white man and the Indian woman.

OLEMAN HATTIE was gripping her rifle with both clawlike hands. The stare of her black eyes was savage, murderous. She was silent, waiting. Luke Spagget had drawn a revolver from the inside of his coat. At the instant that Gurney rode in front of him, his thumb was on the hammer, and at that instant, also, *oleman* Hattie's rifle was easing down.

"You damned old fool, put up that gun!" roared Gurney. "Would you shoot a woman?"

"She's a dang Siwash killer!" Spagget's cry was hoarse and wild. "She ain't human—she's an old she-wolf! Gurney, git out of my way, or you'll get hurt!"

"I ought to, Luke, and let her drill you plenty. Don't you see you ain't got a chance?"

"Let 'er try! Let us shoot it out! I've had enough! I've stood all I can stand, all I'm goin' to stand! You git out, Gurney!"

"*Oleman!*" Gurney spoke sharply to Hattie. "*Klatawa!*"

He had spoken to her on a sudden impulse. Out of the thousand wrinkles of her face her savage black eyes stared into his. Into his answering look he put all of the feeling that was in him, all of the feeling that he had ever received from this country of his. It seemed to him that now, for a moment, that the eternal spirit of its wildness breathed in him, shone from his eyes. It must have been so, for *oleman* Hattie obeyed his look rather than his words, and turned her pony back up the slope, to rejoin the cavalcade.

Gurney turned back to Spagget, to find the old man gazing, with open mouthed amazement, after the old squaw.

"Why, Gurney," he stammered, "it's the same one we—we fought over. She give you that same look before!"

"Yeah." Gurney felt a powerful reaction.

Melancholy shadowed his thoughts. The same *oleman* Hattie. She had come between them again. It hadn't mattered so much the other time. But now he was older. And loneliness was ever harder to bear.

"The same old squaw!" Spagget spoke his amazement again. "By grab, Gurney, I've thought time and again what fools we was to fight over whether Siwashes was human or not. And here we was about to do it again! Over the

same dang one, it gets me, by grab! As fer—as fer as I'm concerned, I—I'm ashamed of myself. I actually am." Old Luke seemed cheered by that confession. He spoke with more confidence. "Let *oleman* Hattie go then, says I. I reckon any range man would say she was in her rights pluggin' young Hawss. So I reckon—I reckon—" his voice faltered once more—"maybe we won't fuss about her or any other Siwashes any more, hey, old-timer?"

"Hell, no!" was all Gurney could say.

BOTH sat silent on their horses and watched the cavalcade file up the cliff rim and then turn off behind it, until *oleman* Hattie's blanketed form sank away from sight.

"I still got that place for you here any time you want it," said Gurney then.

"And ain't I grabbin' for it right now?" Spagget's joyful exclamation was suddenly cut short, and his face set in grim lines. "No, Gurney. Not yet. I was forgettin' the pore, dang sheep. They've still coyotes to you, just as the Siwashes is still dirt to me. We've jet got to put up with that difference in our nachers. I got to go back and stick with the outfit till its troubles are over. Then, old-timer—"

"I figured that's what you'd do," said Gurney quietly. "Well, you're goin' back ridin' on a rack of hay."

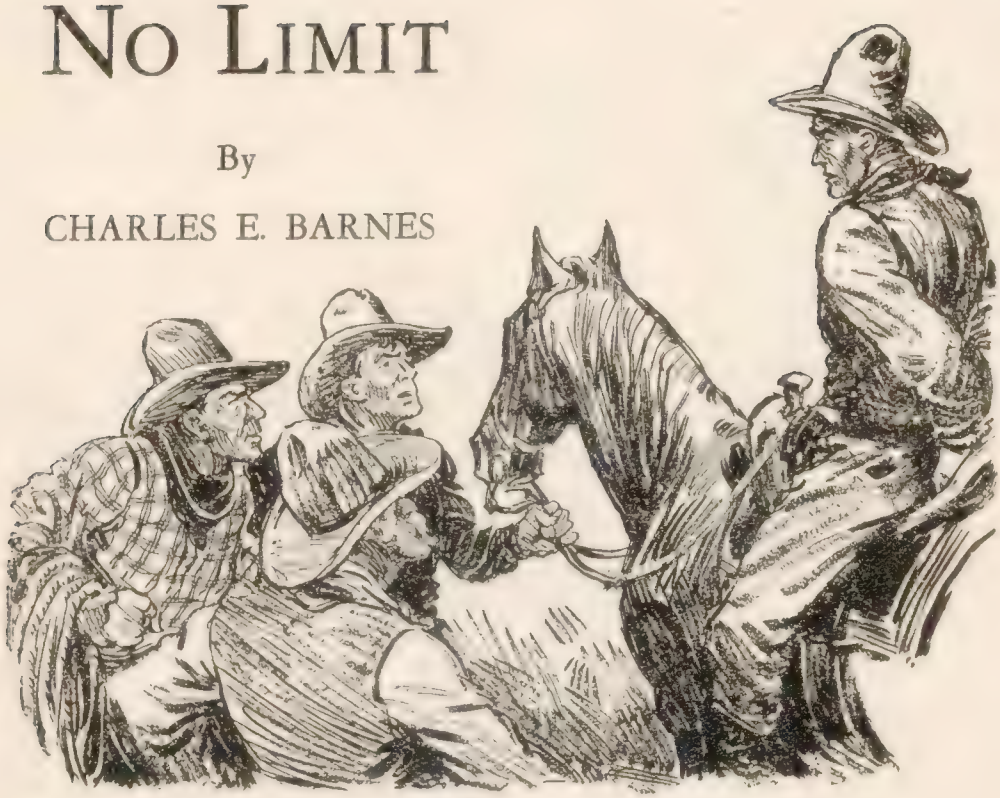
"By grab!"

The two friends could only grin wordlessly at each other. They rode silently down the slope. Each one was looking on the other like a long lost brother, as they rode up to the feedyard. The cattle buyer gazed upon them with tremendous astonishment. Verily, he thought, the ways of these men of the range country were beyond all human understanding.

No Limit

By

CHARLES E. BARNES



A Story of the Old West

WHERE the trail broke out of the timber, No Limit Calhoun dismounted and, leaning against a tree, let his slow gaze travel over the bare foothills stretching away to the south and, lower down, to a wide, treeless, sage covered mesa.

Here and there cattle were grazing. Far over to the east a solitary horseman was riding fast, his dark figure trailing a line of dust like the tail of a comet, but he was moving farther away toward the edge of the mesa.

Some two or three miles to the north the house, barn and corral of a small ranch nestled close under the foothills. Smoke rose from the chimney, but there was no other sign of life. Calhoun noted every one of these things, every detail of the wide prospect, his cold eyes and poker face showing no particular interest, then shrugged his neatly clad shoulders as if dismissing a business which had not been entirely agreeable.

A while longer he gazed out over the mesa, then turned his head; and the light in his eyes warmed to a faint glimmer of admiration as they rested on the horse he had been riding. It was a handsome, high standing bay, with fine head, powerful shoulders and clean, slender legs, and on the right hip was branded 88. Calhoun nodded approvingly and said aloud:

"Somebody'll be feeling mighty sore about losing you, old fellow. You're some horse! It's lucky for me I didn't happen to strike an old skate. There was no time to choose. Horse stealing ain't a game I'd play because I liked it, but we've come this far together and I reckon we'll have

to go farther. There's a house down there and the kitchen stove's going. Where there's fire there's food, and we'd better fill up before we pass on. Maybe it's risky, but if you're as hungry as I am you don't care."

He swung into the saddle, took one more sweeping survey of the mesa and bare hills to the south, turned his horse's head toward the little ranch and boldly rode down the slope.

As he came nearer to the buildings Calhoun was struck with the extreme stillness that surrounded the place. Except for the thin curl of smoke rising from the chimney it might have been deserted. But on turning the corner of the house he saw a saddle horse standing by the door and, suddenly cautious, he reined his own to a stop. There was nothing strange about a horse's being there, but its condition raised a number of questions in Calhoun's mind. It stood with hanging head, hair matted with sweat not yet beginning to dry. Evidently it had been ridden hard and almost to the point of utter exhaustion.

He had seen horses ridden hard that morning, horses pushed to their utmost in a desperate effort to get close enough to riddle the back of his immaculate coat. It was hardly possible that one of them could have gotten ahead of him, still, it was well to be on guard. He had taken it easily and lost much time after eluding that bloodthirsty bunch in the mountains. Dismounting, he approached the tired horse on foot, keeping a wary eye on the open door of the house.

The horse was a bay much like the borrowed one he was riding. It was branded with a cross and two bars. That did not mean anything to him, but on the saddle a dark splotch which was still damp and sticky spoke a language which he understood.

For a full moment he stood without movement, his keen eyes studying the silent house. Something in his subconscious mind was warning him not to get involved in another tragedy—he had troubles enough of his own. Common sense told him there were worse things than hunger, that he would be wise to move on and leave whatever that silent house contained for some one else to investigate. When at last he moved he went to the door and looked in, but did not enter.

THE ROOM had a bare look. What furniture it contained was of the cheapest kind, or home made by an unskilled workman. It gave the impression of poverty, but of a clean poverty and of a spirit that had not yet been broken. At the left side of the room a door stood open, and at the rear another led to the kitchen which Calhoun could see was also empty. His eyes, after taking in all the details of the room, turned again to the door at the left; and he started on seeing that it was no longer empty.

A child of perhaps three years of age was standing there, one hand resting on the door post, the other pushing a finger into the tiny mouth. From under a crown of hair like spun gold, round blue eyes were staring at him with a look of puzzled wonder. Before he had quite recovered from his surprise the child toddled across the room with short, sturdy steps and, looking up into his face, said as if telling news of interest—

"My daddy's all bluggy!"

Whatever of softness may originally have been in Calhoun's nature, life had covered with a case hardened shell. Had he given it any thought at all he would have said that he had neither use nor time for sentiment. But he was conscious now of an unpleasant shock. Though he had listened intently, no sound had come from that other room, and the thought of this golden haired child alone with a dead man gave him an odd feeling of horror.

A few swift strides carried him to the open door, and he stopped again. Directly in front of him a man lay stretched out on the floor, as if he had fallen while trying to reach the bed at the other side of the room. By his side, with her face buried in her arms on his body, lay a woman who was as rigidly still as the man. Only the

slight rise and fall of her shoulders showed that she was alive and breathing. Calhoun knew nothing about women. He had, long ago, come to the opinion that they were a drag on a man of enterprise and he had studiously avoided them. He recognized that here was a grief too deep for him to understand; but oddly enough, it was for the child more than for the woman that his sympathy was stirred. The little one had followed and, pushing past him, now stood, alternately looking down at the motionless figures and up into his face, the wondering blue eyes seeming to ask him for an answer to the puzzle.

Suddenly Calhoun darted into the room and, dropping on one knee, keenly examined the man's face. The blood soaked shirt had been pulled aside from his breast, exposing the bullet hole from which a red stream was oozing. He glanced at this, then put his hand over the man's heart. Fingers that were sensitive to an infinitesimal roughness on a polished card detected a feeble pulsation. Few men had ever heard Calhoun's voice raised, but now it came sharp almost to roughness.

"Brace up, woman, this man ain't dead! Get me some warm water and bandages—quick!"

The woman lifted her head slowly and stared up at Calhoun with eyes that looked frozen. Her brain seemed too stunned to understand anything but her loss.

"Pull yourself together if you want him to live," said Calhoun more gently. "Get water and bandages. I'll do the rest."

Suddenly she realized that this strange man was telling her there was hope. She sprang to her feet and ran out of the room. By the time she returned Calhoun had lifted the man to the bed and pulled off the bloody shirt. Swiftly, and with a skill that showed gunshot wounds were no novelty to him, he washed and bound up the wound. The woman watched him without speaking, her eyes telling of the struggle between her fear and a growing hope. When Calhoun had done all he could he spoke to her with his usual air of cold indifference:

"That's all I can do. You must get a doctor to him as soon as you can. If he gets here in time your husband's got a good chance of living."

The faint gleam of hope left the woman's eyes and fear took possession of them again.

"I don't know how to get the doctor," she gasped.

"Haven't you a man you can send?"

"There's nobody but us," she replied in a broken tone. "I'd go myself only Ben's horse is done up—he'd never get there."

"Is that the only horse you've got?"

The woman nodded.

"Where is the nearest doctor?"

"At Red Mesa."

For a minute Calhoun did not speak. The woman's pleading eyes were bent on his expressionless face, her lips trembling with a question she seemed afraid to ask, but he did not see her. His brows were drawn in a slight frown and he looked past her with an unseeing stare. Then, in through the door toddled the child, a ray of sunlight resting for an instant on its crown of gold. The frown smoothed out of Calhoun's face, but the line of his tight lips grew harder.

"I'll get him," he said. "What's your name?"

"Harris," she replied. "Will you get him here soon?"

"Just as soon as horseflesh can bring him."

SPURRING his tired horse across the mesa on a line which he imagined would bring him straight to the town of Red Mesa, Calhoun's face grew more grim with each mile he covered. Each stride of the bay was bringing him that much nearer to the rope that was waiting for him. Only through some unheard of miracle could he hope to be alive one hour after showing himself in Red Mesa—perhaps it would take less than a quarter of that time.

To be sure, there was another way out. No man who packed a gun and knew how

to use it need feel a noose on his neck. But that meant a lot of killing and Calhoun did not like killing. He had been obliged to do it too many times when his life had depended on his speed in getting into action. Either way was disagreeable, but on the whole it was better to die fighting. And all because of a little child with blue eyes and hair of gold.

"Peter Calhoun, you're a damn fool!"

Calhoun muttered it aloud, but at the same time he spurred the horse, which was beginning to lag in its stride.

At the edge of the mesa, where he could look down on the streets of the little town, Calhoun paused for the first time. Eagerly he studied the scene before him, searching for some sign that would tell him whether the posse that had chased him to the mountains had yet returned. It would make a great difference if they were still absent. It might be possible to bluff the more peaceable citizens who were left behind. It all looked very tranquil. The streets were almost deserted. Even at the three saloons there were less than the usual number of horses at the tie rails. Calhoun drew a breath of relief and pushed on, taking a diagonal trail down the slope.

At the blacksmith's on the edge of town he inquired as to where he would find the doctor. The smith looked at him curiously but directed him, and then stood and watched him as he rode on down the street. The doctor's cottage was at the far end, which meant that Calhoun must ride the whole length of the main street, past the loungers in front of the three saloons, the hotel, the store and post office. Before he got to the other end every man in town would know that the man they chased out in the early morning was riding down the main street.

He spurred his horse to an easy lope but made no effort to hurry. To all appearance he was serenely unconscious of danger, but out of the corner of his eye he saw the look of astonishment on every face he passed, and the stir of excitement he left in his wake. He had passed two saloons and was approaching the Idle Hour when a man, on whose vest a silver star glittered, stepped out into the road and held up his hand.

Here, thought Calhoun, was a way out of his difficulty. He pulled up in front of the sheriff but did not wait for him to speak.

"I'm going to the doctor's, Sheriff," he said curtly. "He's wanted by a man that's dying, and there's not a minute to spare. Come with me and when I've talked to him I'll talk to you."

"Who's the man?" the sheriff demanded suspiciously.

"Man by the name of Harris—he lives at a little ranch up by the foothills."

"Ben Harris! What's the matter with him?"

"He's been shot."

The sheriff sent a shrewd glance over Calhoun's tired horse, then said gruffly:

"Gimme yer gun an' go on—I'll follow you."

Calhoun winced. Whatever happened it was no part of his program to give up his gun. With that he felt he was master of his fate; without it he would be helpless.

"If you want it after I've talked to you, you can have it," he said, preparing to ride on.

"You'll give it to me now if you got any likin' fer a whole skin," the sheriff retorted, at the same time making a motion with his hand toward the sidewalk.

Calhoun then became aware that two men, standing on the board walk, had him covered and at the slightest sign from the sheriff could drill him. To show fight was worse than useless, and his errand was yet unfinished. With a smile in which there was more bitterness than mirth he took the gun from his shoulder holster and handed it to the sheriff.

"Take good care of it, Sheriff," he said. "I'll want it again. I'll wait for you at the doctor's."

The doctor was at home and his horse was at the door. In a few words Calhoun explained the situation at the Harris ranch and the pressing need for haste, then seated himself on the steps to wait

for the sheriff. He could see him coming down the street, followed at a short distance by the two men who, probably, were deputies, and their slow approach he felt was bringing a fate from which he could not escape. To run was futile. The sheriff had known that. The bay horse had no speed in him.

There was only one chance; but that gave him little hope. He knew too much of the ways of sheriffs in wild countries. The evidence against him was overwhelming and to oppose it there was only his own word—the word of a gambler and a stranger. It would not go far. What need for putting the county to the expense of a trial? It would amount to the same thing in the end. But, though he was without hope, it was not Calhoun's way to show weakness.

WHEN the sheriff stopped in front of him he courteously invited him to take a seat at his side while, as he said, "we talk this matter over."

"'Tain't no use talkin' it over. Reckon we know all we wanta know," was the sheriff's gruff answer.

Nevertheless he took a seat on the steps.

"I didn't see you here this morning, Sheriff," said Calhoun.

"No, I wa'n't here—or mebbe it wouldn't 'a' happened."

"I didn't shoot that man, Sheriff."

"Then how'd he git shot?"

"Somebody shot him through the window."

"How come you had all his money?"

"I won it from him at poker."

"An' I s'pose the boys was dreamin' that your gun was still smokin' when they bust into the room."

"I fired at the man outside."

"If that's true what fer did you run?"

"It was either that or killing half a dozen men. They wouldn't believe me any more than you're believing me now."

"I reckon you'll have to produce the feller that shot through the window before anybody'll believe that. Nobody said nothin' 'bout there bein' two shots."

"They were mighty close together."

"Huh!" The sheriff's grunt might have expressed anything but belief.

"If you'll keep the mob quiet and give me time I can prove I didn't kill him."

"How you gonna prove it?"

"Did you get the bullet that killed him?"

"Dunno. Doc held the inquest—mebbe he's got it."

"Make them wait till Doc gets back. I think that bullet will prove something."

"What you're tryin' to put over'll want some provin'! Whadda you know 'bout the shootin' o' Ben Harris?"

"Nothing at all. I stopped there to get some food and found him almost dead. His horse had been ridden to a standstill and there was blood on the saddle."

"What was the idee o' comin' back here when you knowed what was waitin' fer yuh?"

"Somebody had to come, and there was no one there but his wife and kid."

The sheriff studied Calhoun's impassive face and seemed to be groping for an explanation of something beyond his understanding, then turned away and, after a moment, addressed the buildings across the way.

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"Beats hell, don't it, what a fool the wisest man can make of himself."

"Mebbe you was, an' mebbe you wasn't. We're mighty soon gonna find out!"

The sheriff's eyes were on a cloud of dust where the road to the south dipped into a hollow, and as he spoke, horsemen began to stream over the top of the ridge. They were less than a mile away and coming fast.

"Cal Hunter beat it out o' town jest after you come in," the sheriff remarked, "an' he's spilled the beans 'bout yer bein' here." He turned to his two deputies, who were waiting at a distance of a few paces. "Jake, you two fellers git alongside, an' keep rememb'rin' that this feller's my prisoner an' the hull o' Red Mesa ain't gonna take him away from me!"

"Much obliged, Sheriff," Calhoun said quietly. "If it comes to a showdown, give

me a gun and then keep out of it."

"I will like hell!" the sheriff growled.

IN A MOMENT the horsemen swept into the wide street at a run and pulled up in front of the doctor's shack, raising a cloud of dust that hid their number from sight. When it settled, Calhoun found himself the center of a semicircle, beyond which was a solid mass of horsemen filling the street. He and the sheriff were still sitting on the step in front of the doctor's door. The deputies were standing, one on either side of the steps, their faces plainly showing they felt little enthusiasm about resisting that mob. Neither Calhoun nor the sheriff looked in any way concerned. Calhoun coolly scanned the front row of faces, meeting fierce and murderous scowls with complete indifference. The sheriff calmly waited for some one to open the ball.

A man with bulbous nose and mean looking pig eyes had pushed a little way to the front and was the first to speak.

"The joke's on us, Dan," he said, addressing the sheriff. "We bust ourselves chasin' all over creation an' you pick up the damn' coyote right here in town! You won't be wantin' to bother with him. We'll take care of him fer you."

"When I'm wantin' any help, John Schultz, I'll ask fer it," the sheriff replied coldly. "I've arrested this man an' I'll take care of him myself."

A murmur arose from the ranks, but died away when Schultz spoke again.

"What's got into you, Dan?" he demanded. "You wa'n't there, an' mebbe you don't know he killed my pardner, Chuck Mason, when he had no gun—shot him down like a dog, an' we caught him with his gun still smokin'. You sure ain't gonna stand up fer no such sneakin' killer! You ain't never done that before!"

"I know all 'bout that," the sheriff replied, "an' I know a lot of other things. You fellers natchully believes what you see, an' I ain't blamin' you, but there's things you don't see. This feller's got a alibi that's gotta be looked into before there's any hangin'. If he done what you say, he wouldn't 'a' rode back into this town to git the doctor fer Ben Harris when he found him shot."

"Ben Harris shot!" The exclamation came in several voices from the crowd.

"Is he dead?" Schultz asked, looking more shocked by this news than any of the others.

"I dunno, but he wa'n't awhile ago, or there wouldn't been no use gittin' the doctor. But what I'm sayin's that any feller that'd come back here knowin' what was waitin' fer him, jest to help out a stranger that was in trouble, never done what you say he done!"

Calhoun, under a mask of indifference, was keenly studying the faces of the crowd and saw that the sheriff's shot had gone home. Many of the fierce scowls changed to looks of doubt, and one or two looked at him with frank admiration. Schultz only sneered.

"He's a slick one, that tinhorn," he said. "He knowed he couldn't git away 'less he wanted to starve in the mountains, an' he comes this dodge to prove he's a good feller. 'Tain't no use, Dan. This feller was caught with the goods an' we're gonna hang him whether you like it or not. I'm givin' you fair warnin'. We don't wanta do nothin' to you, but we're gonna take him right now, an' it won't be safe to try an' stop us."

A glance was enough to detect the swinging of the mob. With but few exceptions they had recovered their confidence and with it lust for the blood of this killer. Guns were already showing and, though none were yet pointed at the group by the steps, at the slightest offensive motion they could be drilled like sieves. The deputies had been growing more and more nervous, and now one of them stepped away from the building with his hands kept well above his belt.

"I ain't gonna git myself perforated fer no damn' killer," he shouted to the sheriff. "If you got any sense you'll give him up!"

Without waiting for a reply he turned away and, pushing between the horses, disappeared. The other deputy, less bold,

sneaked along the face of the building and faded around the corner. Calhoun glanced at the sheriff. His eyes had followed the retreat of his deputies with an expression of utter contempt, but now were cold and hard as steel, his face like a block of granite.

"WELL, Dan, whatcha gonna do?" It was Schultz who asked the question, and Calhoun knew that the time for argument had passed. Whether his life was to be measured by seconds or minutes depended on the sheriff's next move. Slowly both men rose to their feet. The sheriff, with thumbs resting on his belt, head thrown back defiantly, stared straight into Schultz's eyes.

"I deserve killin'," he said slowly, "fer pickin' white livered coyotes fer deputies, but nobody ain't never figgered Dan Barlow was a coward. You're wantin' to take my prisoner? Well—come an' git him!"

An instant of dead silence followed the sheriff's challenge. His grim defiance left no doubt in the minds of the mob that he would fight. Several of the riders began to move forward, but before he could make the motion that would draw a storm of flying lead, Calhoun had leaped in front of him.

"Put up your guns—I surrender," he shouted to the crowd; then turning to the sheriff:

"It's no use, Dan. You're too good a man to get yourself killed, and I'm done for, anyway."

He turned and strode directly toward Schultz, his hands held above his shoulders. Two men leaped from their saddles and seized him and in a moment he was surrounded by a mob that shut the sheriff from view.

"Put him on his horse!" a voice cried.

The bay horse was still standing near the doctor's door, too tired to move. Calhoun was led, unresisting, to the horse, his hands were tied behind him and he was helped to the saddle. As he moved off down the street the center of a mob of horsemen, over their heads he caught a glimpse of the sheriff. Dan Barlow had not moved but there was about him such an air of dejection that Calhoun felt a great pity for a brave man who had been defeated without a fight.

During that short ride no one had the satisfaction of seeing Calhoun show a single quiver of fear. If he felt any curiosity about the plans of the mob he did not show it. He knew what the end would be and the rest did not matter. He had played his cards, if he had made a mistake—it was done. The game had gone against him and he accepted defeat with the calm of a stoic.

Red Mesa boasted no trees, but a gallows stood ready in the beam used to hoist hay to the loft of the livery stable, and the rope was ready. Calhoun's horse was led under the beam. A noose was swiftly made and slipped over his head. The rope was drawn tight. Then for the first time Calhoun shuddered. There would be no sudden drop with the mercy of a broken neck. The horse would be driven from under him and he would be pulled higher to be strangled to death. With closed eyes, he was struggling to overcome his fit of weakness when a voice called from the crowd.

"Wait jest a minute 'fore you choke him!"

A short, stocky man with gray hair and fierce eyes was shouldering his way to the front. Calhoun felt his heart leap with sudden hope, but it was soon gone. The man planting himself before Calhoun, glared up at him fiercely and demanded—

"I wanta know where you got that hoss!"

"I found this horse tied behind the Idle Hour," Calhoun replied. "I was somewhat in a hurry so I borrowed him."

"Is that the first time you seen him? Mebbe you tied him there yerself."

"Don't talk nonsense," Calhoun retorted. "Everybody knows I came in last night on the stage."

"Then, looka here you fellers!" the old man shouted, turning to the crowd. "I wanta know somethin' 'bout how that hoss got there. That's my hoss, Red Blazes. He's branded 88, but it was done

careless. If you look close you kin see where the runnin' iron's been over my BS. John Schultz, how does my hoss come to be wearin' your brand?"

"I don't know nothin' 'bout yer hoss," Schultz growled. "Anyhow, what's it got to do with hangin' this tinhorn killer?"

"Who rode him in here last night?"

"How do I know? I ain't never seen the hoss before."

Calhoun had been listening intently and it appeared to him time that he took a hand.

"If you'll look in the saddle pocket you'll find something that may tell you who rode him," he said quietly.

THE MAN who was holding the horse lifted the flap of the pocket and took out a Colt .45 with a bone handle. He looked at it curiously and passed it to the old man, who turned and faced Schultz with blazing eyes.

"So you don't know nothin' 'bout my hoss—never seen him before!" he shouted. "John Schultz, you're a damn liar an' a hoss thief! Mebbe you never seen this gun neither."

"Is that gun loaded?"

The sharp question came from the sheriff who suddenly appeared at Calhoun's side. The old man examined the weapon and replied—

"It's been fired once."

"Jest what I was figgerin'," the sheriff declared. "Now, you fellers, listen to me, an' don't let John Schultz git away. 'Pears like he's kinda lost interest in this hangin' an' is aimin' to git into a back seat. This man, Calhoun, says somebody shot Mason through the window, an' he fired at the feller but didn't git him. Where was John Schultz when them shots was fired?"

"He came in jest when we was bustin' open the door," a young cowboy replied from the rear of the crowd.

"Yeah, well, his horse is tied out behind the saloon, an' there's his gun that's been fired once. He could 'a' shot through the window, shoved his gun in the saddle pocket an' chased around to the front door."

From the crowd came a storm of excited voices.

"The low down, sneakin' reptile!"

"A hoss thief!"

"Killed his own pardner!"

Schultz, hemmed in by the dense crowd, was dragged, cursing and protesting, from the saddle. They were dragging him toward the rope which was still on Calhoun's neck, when the sheriff called a halt.

"There you go ag'in!" he shouted. "You was so danged sure Calhoun done the killin', you was dead set on shootin' me an' hangin' him, an' now you're puttin' it down to Schultz 'cause he stole a hoss an' might 'a' done it. There's a way o' provin' who done that killin', an' that's what we're gonna do. Schultz's gun's a .45. I got Calhoun's an' it's a .38. When Doc Weston gits back we'll find out what kind o' bullet killed Chuck Mason. Till then there won't be no hangin'. I'm takin' care o' both men, an' you fellers kin make yer bets on that bullet. Jake Hinty, if your liver's got through shiverin', you an' Bill take Schultz. I'll look after Calhoun. Now, hit the pike, all o' you, 'cause there ain't nothin' more doin' till Doc gits back."

There was some murmuring, but it soon became clear that the great majority were in favor of waiting for the conclusive evidence the doctor would bring. Schultz was taken in charge by the two deputies and, at the sheriff's order, they hustled him into the stable to be held there until the crowd dispersed. Barlow's attention was called to his other prisoner by a complaining voice.

"Perhaps some one will be kind enough to remove this necktie," Calhoun suggested. "If this horse wasn't too tired to move I'd have been hung by this time anyhow. Also, I'd like to remark, it's twenty-four hours since I ate."

AT THE hotel, Calhoun made up for those twenty-four hours of fasting. The sheriff ate with him, and when they had finished, he led the way to the bar and took possession of a table in one

corner of the room. They exchanged few words and said nothing at all about their recent experience, but each was conscious that the one strenuous half hour had left them with a mutual feeling of respect. The bar was crowded, and though no one approached their corner, Calhoun knew from the glances cast in his direction that public sentiment was now in his favor.

It was nine o'clock before a commotion at the door and a babel of excited voices announced the arrival of Doc Weston. The doctor was covered with dust and looked very tired, but his tread was very determined as he strode to the table where the sheriff was sitting.

"Dan, I've got some more work for you," he said when he came to a stand, jammed against the table by the crowd that surged from all parts of the room.

"One thing at a time, Doc," the sheriff replied. "We got some business here that's got to be settled. Did you git the bullet that killed Chuck Mason?"

"I did."

"What was it?"

"A .45."

It was all that was needed to let loose the passions of the mob. Pandemonium broke out in the crowded room and there was a concerted movement toward the door. The sheriff sprang to his feet and, with a voice that pierced the bedlam of sound, shouted:

"Hold on there! You got plenty o' time! Doc ain't told us 'bout this new business. I reckon it's 'bout the shootin' o' Ben Harris."

Probably nothing but curiosity could have stopped the rush. They paused and, seeing that in Doc Weston's grim face which told them his story would be worth hearing, suddenly they became still.

"I've just come from Ben Harris," the doctor explained, "and he wouldn't be alive now if it hadn't been that the man you were going to hang is a real man. If I'd got there ten minutes later I'd have found a dead man. He came to before I left and he told me the whole story. It was John Schultz that shot him, and it was John Schultz that killed Chuck Mason. They had both discovered that Schultz was stealing and rebranding horses and had warned him to get out of the country, because they meant to tell what they knew. He boasted to Ben, before he shot him, that he had already done for Mason."

As the doctor finished, an angry roar burst from a hundred throats. In a moment the room was empty save for the sheriff, Doc Weston and Calhoun. For some minutes the three were silent, listening to the gradually decreasing tramp of the maddened crowd. At last Doc Weston, his brows drawn in a worried frown, looked at the sheriff.

"I'm afraid they'll do worse than hang him," he said, "but I suppose he deserves it."

"He'll hang, all right," the sheriff replied indifferently, "but somebody else'll do the hangin'. Schultz is half way to the county seat."

"Can't have an officer who beats up men," said the ship's superintendent. But Carty was fighting Irish, and he received~

IRISH PROMOTION

By RALPH R. PERRY

LIKE a game cock Dennis Carty stepped up to the big Italian sailor. No—belay that! Dennis walked up to Louie like the fighting Irish third mate he was.

"You will so grease that deck winch," said Dennis, neither shouting nor swearing, but talking quick and hard between his teeth. "'Seaman ye may be, and the job the day engineer's by rights, but we're sailing in an hour. I've no time to hunt up the engineer or listen to your lip. I told you—grease that winch!"

With a battle light in his eyes Dennis moved closer to the surly Italian. The mate wasn't in any respect a big man. Five feet nine at the most, counting in the heels on his shoes; broad shouldered enough to carry a hundred and sixty-five pounds without any fat—and yet by contrast with Louie he was a terrier teasing a Great Dane.

The sailor was of a height unusual in men of his nationality, with the solid bone and heavy muscle characteristic of the Piedmontese. He was somewhat fat. Italians of forty are apt to be, no matter how much hard work they do; but he stood over six feet; he had a pair of shoulders like an old fashioned safe and a face which advertised he was a tough customer and proud of it. An old knife slash ran

from eye to chin; there was even a streak of white in his drooping black mustache.

He scowled, but that was exactly as far as he cared to carry the argument. Dennis was much too eager for any more overt act or word—poised on tiptoe, fists unclenched, but with his arms slightly bent, and a joyous gleam in his gray eyes. The entire crew of the *Sibonia* knew their third mate's reputation and, had Louie been ignorant, the record was imprinted on Dennis' face.

It was a slightly lumpy face. Bare knuckles will cut and leave scars. Dennis' nose had been broken, and was slightly out of line. Under the long upper lip three teeth, knocked out in a fight at Port Said, had been replaced by gold, and the reckless good nature of the face as a whole, though it indicated Dennis Carty would be a pleasant shipmate, gave evidence even more forcible that he was a pugnacious man who wouldn't quit a fight until some one was carried away on a stretcher.

"CARTY! Mr. Carty! Will you come here, please?" hailed the *Sibonia's* captain hastily.

From amidships he had seen that joyous, reckless advance on the big sailor, and the skipper knew his third mate better than any of the crew.

"I said grease it!" ordered Dennis under his breath, and trotted obediently forward to join his commander.

The mate was grinning when he reached Captain Arthur's side. He knew in advance what the Old Man was going to say.

"Louie refused duty, sir," he declared defensively.

"Louie is a sea lawyer and a tough egg. Never mind that. I'm talking to *you*," said the captain.

Arthur was a plump, white haired man past sixty. Within a year he would be pensioned and retired; already he was dreaming of his little farm ashore, anticipating the pleasure of sleeping every night at home.

"Do you know why the superintendent telephoned you to come ashore in this rotten weather and with the ship going to sail?"

The captain had always been an easy going man. The prospect of retirement had mollified a temper naturally equable, so that the explosive quality of that question was a surprise to Dennis.

"Sure. Superintendent wants to make a speech," retorted the third mate. "You've told him I've earned promotion. You want me as second mate. I'm obliged to you. But before I can wear an extra stripe on my sleeve the super's got to have me in the office and fill me up with a lot of gas. Lot of hooey about duty—pleasure to reward an efficient seaman—more promotion in the future. All that bunk. Didn't I listen to him yarn when I got the job as Third—five years ago? Waste of time, I call it!"

"You're wrong," said the captain still more earnestly. "Dennis, if it was just a boost to second mate I could sign you on myself. Think hard, man! It's more than that. I'm going to retire, and the chief officer is as old as me. He's going to leave, too. He's got the money saved. The second mate of the *Sibonia's* going to be her master in a year. That's why the superintendent wants to see you, and that's why I tell you—be easy, Dennis! You've got on your shore suit, but you can slip up on that promotion even now. The superintendent don't think you're quite—ah—reliable. That scrap you had in Port Said—"

Dennis grinned, but he answered soberly enough.

"I never slammed any man aboard ship," he pointed out.

"Never yet," said Arthur, with significance. "I wouldn't worry about tough eggs like Louie. Not today. Those wops carry knives mostly, and this weather's enough to make a jackrabbit cuss his grandma. Louie'll calm down when we get to sea."

Dennis thrust out his under lip in the way an Irishman will when he wants to contradict what has just been said without taking the time to answer in words. He was thinking. He had suspected that

the chief officer might be considering retirement, but it was one thing to suspect it, and another to be told flat out that it was the case. For him to see the superintendent might not be so much bunk, and a waste of time, as he had supposed. Carty was ambitious. The prospect of command of the *Sibonia*, a ten thousand ton cargo steamer only eight years old, made his gray eyes flash, and the weather *was* bad enough to excuse Louie's surliness.

Yes, it was a nasty day, and nastiest for putting to sea. An easterly gale, freezing cold, was whipping the storm warning flags at Sandy Hook. The air was thick with a mixture of rain and snow, wet enough to work down the neck of a man's oilskins, cold enough to freeze on brows and eyelashes and blind him more completely than any fog could do. There was a derelict reported in the eastbound steamer lanes a hundred miles out from New York. The *Sibonia* would pass the spot in Dennis' watch, if he were to be second mate. A bad watch of it he'd have, with this gale driven snow scouring at his eyeballs and nothing visible a hundred feet beyond the ship's bow.

Yes, it would be nasty at sea, and nastier getting there. Dennis looked aft. Since dawn stevedores and crew had been working in the cold and slush. From amidships coal dust was arising in clouds. After, a general cargo was going into the hatches. Cased machinery, most of it, heavy and hard to handle. Sailors and stevedores were in one another's way, fighting against slippery footing and stiff, ice roughened cordage. By the winch on the poop, eight feet above the after well deck, Louie stood with the grease pot dangling from one huge fist. The sailor caught the mate's eye, and scowled defiantly.

Sharply Dennis sucked in his breath; slowly he expelled it.

"It's as you say, Captain," he answered. "I like to fight too much for my own good, belike. I don't mean to. Just find my mitts going. But today—you watch me, now!"

WITH a grin Dennis rammed both fists into his overcoat pockets and walked straight for the gangway, which led to the shore from a point just beneath the break of the poop. He moved swiftly, conspicuous among the men who crowded the after well deck by reason of his new blue overcoat and highly polished tan shoes. A sling load of boxes, hoisted from the dock, barred his way. He halted at the head of the gangway and, looking up, found Louie scowling at him. The grease pot still dangled from the Italian's fist.

"I told you—grease it," snapped Dennis.

A cunning leer spread over the Italian's surly face.

"Aye, aye, sir!" he said.

With exaggerated quickness he turned to obey the order, awkwardly he pretended to slip on the icy deck, and a quart of black, viscid cylinder oil flipped out of the grease pot and spattered Dennis from his hat to his new tan shoes.

For one second the mate stood still, rigid with fury.

"Carty! Mr. Carty!" roared Captain Arthur.

But Dennis was up the ladder and on to the poop in two jumps. His right fist slammed Louie between the eyes.

The big sailor staggered. To recover, he hurled the grease bucket at the mate's head. It was dodged expertly, and Dennis slipped in to land a one-two punch to the heart and body that made the big Italian grunt, sprang back, slipped out of overcoat and coat with one movement, and settled down to serious fighting.

Serious it was from the start. The deck was too slippery for much foot work. A grinning of howling, jabbering stevedores, Italians to a man, hemmed the mate into a ten foot semicircle with the sheer drop to the well deck on the far side. Louie had never heard of the Marquis of Queensbury rules, and wouldn't have agreed with them anyhow. He used his feet from the start.

There was time for an instant of wrestling; the two staggered forward, with

Dennis keeping his feet somehow. Head against the big Italian's chest, both arms were going like pistons—short, jolting smashes to heart and wind that numbed and crippled. In-fighting isn't spectacular. It's just deadly. The yelling stevedores were thinking Louie was getting much the best of it when the big man gasped out a curse, tried to thrust the mate away, and failing, stumbled backward, pulling a clasp knife from his pocket and snapping the blade open.

No one moved to interfere. Knives were fair enough under their code. Dennis saw the weapon. But in drawing it Louie made himself as wide open a mark as ever boxer prayed for. The knife went up—but a left hook caught Louie behind the ear and, as he staggered, a right uppercut, swung from the deck, perfectly timed, caught him squarely on the point of his thick jaw. He staggered backward, the knife flying from his hand, slipped on the wet planks and vanished, heels over head, over the break of the poop.

Something about the thud with which he struck the deck, eight feet below, and the absence of any sound after that, silenced the jabbering, screaming crowd. Dennis' face was white when he walked to the edge and peered down.

"Send for the captain," he muttered through his teeth.

"I send for da cop! You 'ave keel him!" screamed the boss stevedore, and Dennis, with a faint smile, shrugged his shoulders.

"Guess you'd better, Guisepp'," he answered. "I think so myself."

LOUIE lay motionless on his back. His arms were outflung, as if he had not moved a muscle since the fall. His face was pallid under the swarthy skin, and a thin stream of blood was tinging crimson the dirty slush beneath his head.

Rough and ready efforts at resuscitation had no effect. A bucket of water was flung over him, the neck of a bottle thrust between his teeth. His chest began to heave in deep gasps, but Louie's eyes remained closed.

"The sailor drew a knife," whispered Arthur. "Mr. Carty is an officer—about to be promoted. The sailor slipped—"

"You shut your trap," said the cop. "Looks to me like that guy's head was broke. He's breathin', but I'm takin' the other fellow to the station house till a doctor tells us whether he'll live."

Ignoring the captain, the cop caught Dennis by the arm.

"Coming peaceable?" he inquired grimly.

The fight had gone out of Dennis. He nodded, and walked quietly off the ship in the wake of the policeman. At the station house he was booked and locked into a cell. Here his first act was to wipe the dirty oil off his shoes. He tried to clean his overcoat, but gave the job up and seated himself on the hard bench which served as a bed.

"Louie had it coming," he said aloud, and then shook his head. "No, that ain't it," he went on. "I just can't help it. I says to myself, 'Walk ashore and tend to him later'. Next thing I knew I was slammin' Louie in the eye. Well—wonder what comes next?"

FOR AN hour nothing happened. Then to the mate's relief, Captain Arthur appeared in the corridor, and a policeman who followed unlocked the cell door, motioning Dennis to step out.

"Louie came to. Nothing's broken. He don't want to prosecute," muttered the skipper all in one breath.

"Then I'm a lucky guy!" said Dennis loudly.

He wondered why Arthur should continue to frown, why he should hesitate to speak.

"Well, not exactly," muttered the skipper. "You see, Dennis, the superintendent phoned to know why you didn't show up. I had to tell him, didn't I?"

"Yes," said Dennis.

"He sent down another second mate. And another third mate," the captain gulped. "Dennis, he fired you. I—I talked as fast as I could. I—I wanted you to have the berth, but—"

"But I'm on the beach, is that it?" said Dennis, as heartily as he could. "Well, never you mind, Skipper. It wasn't your fault—"

But Captain Arthur shook his white head. He was a mild man, but he was tenacious.

"You're not on the beach unless you want to be," he said. "I hesitate to suggest it, Dennis. Louie made threats—and of course it's a big comedown for you, but if you want to sail on the *Sibonia*, as bosun, I'll sign you on. It's all I can do."

"So it's threats Louie's making, is it?" snapped Dennis. "Then I'm the lad he should be making them to. It's Irish promotion you're offering, me, Skipper, but for a fact it would be a pleasure to handle the sailors direct, for a change. Particularly Louie."

"I don't want you to fight," said the captain anxiously.

"Which I won't," promised Dennis. "Sitting for an hour behind cold iron, thinking that you've killed a man, changes your ideas about fighting. I'm cured."

At the moment Dennis really believed it. Believed it so firmly that his sincerity convinced the older man.

AT DARK, with the wind rising and the rain turning altogether to snow, the *Sibonia* dropped her pilot and set her bow into the long Atlantic combers. She was making heavy weather of it before the yellow flash of Ambrose Channel lightship dropped out of sight astern; by midnight overstrained engines and a storm tossed, creaking hull were locked in a wrestle with the sea which made sleep difficult and thought impossible for her crew.

That was as well, perhaps. The newly signed mates were unfamiliar with the ship. The crew had no confidence in them; nor did the forecastle know how to interpret the presence of Dennis Carty as boatswain. He had been demoted. He was a foremast hand, one of themselves. To that extent Louie had won a victory, yet Dennis drove Louie and all to their work with a cold fury. Louie might swagger. He might brag under his breath that he was going to show up the ex-mate, but it looked rather as if Dennis were back for the purpose of showing up Louie. Under his bluster the big Italian was nervous, and a tough sailor who is bewildered and half afraid is dangerous.

Dennis himself didn't know quite where he stood. It was strange to be working around the decks with the ship at sea, when the habit of years cried out that he should be standing watch. He himself had little confidence in the mates, and at midnight, with every job he could think of done, he found himself unable to sleep.

Captain Arthur and the chief mate were still on the bridge. They would be there all night if the snow continued. The derelict, somewhere close at hand now, was on Dennis' mind also, so much so that when the watch changed he hastened after the sailor going to relieve the lookout and clapped him on the shoulder.

It was Louie. At the touch the big Italian started and whirled around, thrusting one hand into his oilskins for a weapon.

"Belay that," snapped Dennis. "You and me'll settle later if you ain't got a bellyful. Right now I want a bright lookout, see?"

"Da snow," Louie growled.

It was whirling about them in level, stinging volleys. Twenty feet away vision was blotted out. Standing at the foremast shrouds, as the two were, they seemed to be alone in a black, howling chaos. Through the darkness they could barely make out the bulk of the bridge. To starboard the flying snow gleamed green, to port blood red, in the veiled glow of the ship's running lights.

"I know, but it may lift, see?" said Dennis. "I'm going forward to stand watch in the bow. If we hit anything in this it'll be *toute suite* for us. We'd freeze in open boats even if we could launch them."

"I look out, a'right," growled Louie.

Somehow it sounded like a threat. A

shiver not born of gale or snow shook Dennis. He went forward, leaving the big Italian standing by the shrouds.

In the bow it was very dark and wet. The *Sibonia* buried her nose deeply in every roll. Heavy spray flung aboard. The anchor engine was coated with ice. The decks underfoot were slick with it. Dennis hadn't reached his post before he turned back. He couldn't see anything ahead, anyhow. Behind him—there was a movement in the darkness there. Louie had followed. He had Dennis penned into the narrow triangle of the ship's bows.

"Drop your knife, you yellow coward," howled the mate.

He hoped Irish luck would let him land the first punch on the button. There'd be just one blow struck this time. Then they'd slip on the ice and the rest would be rough and tumble, with all the advantage to the heavier man. Dennis braced himself against the bulwark. Louie, with a throaty chuckle, inched forward.

AT THAT instant three things happened quick as watch ticks. The *Sibonia* struck the derelict. The iron plates of her hull just abaft the starboard bow buckled and snapped. She lurched sickly, stopped dead in the water, and as she hung there a wave rose clear over the bulwark and buried the forecastle waist deep in green water and foam.

The collision flung Dennis into Louie's arms, the lurch slid them both into the base of the anchor engine, and the rush of water held them there in a tangle of arms and legs. Dennis, who was on top, and who had struck nothing harder than Louie's body, was first to scramble to his feet. The Italian was knocked breathless and half drowned. He had lost his knife, but nevertheless he made a clumsy snatch at the mate. Having started a murder, he had to finish.

Dennis kicked him in the ribs. It was a calculated kick, intended to bring the sailor to his senses. To have finished Louie then and there would have been easy enough, but the mate had more pressing matters.

"Belay!" he said. "You never came after me. You never pulled a knife. Our fight is finished, see?"

He hoped that Louie would see. Probably things were happening too fast for the Italian to get through his slow moving brain, but Dennis jumped to the rail, took a look at the damage and then grabbed the rail with all his strength, shouting a warning. The biggest comber he had ever seen was hurtling out of the darkness on to the ship, and from the corner of his eye he glimpsed Captain Arthur and the chief mate, running onto the forecastle head to inspect the damage themselves.

The warning came too late. Tons of green water buried Dennis, and the same wave caught the officers in the open, washed them down into the well deck and flung them heavily against the steel plates below the bridge. Then and not until then, was the helmsman able to get the *Sibonia* back on her course. In that thirty seconds the damage had been done.

There was a ten foot gash in the ship's side, just above the water line, where every wave and roll would send water into the two forward holds.

Water in those two compartments would be enough to sink the ship. A glance told Dennis that much. Captain Arthur and the chief mate were lying in a limp heap in the lee waterways. Knocked senseless, if nothing worse. Louie had pulled a belaying pin loose from the rail and was starting toward Dennis.

The latter, however, ran aft and lifted Captain Arthur in his arms. The new second mate, hurrying from the bridge, picked up the chief mate, and the two staggered back to the charthouse with their burdens.

"Leaks above water. We can save the old wagon," said Dennis curtly, wiping the blood from a gash in Captain Arthur's scalp.

The second mate, a tall, blond, pale man of thirty-five, shrugged and faced him.

"Who says so?" he wanted to know. "I've sent out an SOS."

"Me," declared Dennis. "I'm no bosun, feller. I'm the second mate of this wagon by rights, with a license just as good as yours. *And* I know the ship. You do as I say or I'll knock your block off."

"Oh—you're Dennis Carty, huh?" demanded the newly signed officer, who didn't know the ship, and had experience enough to realize how helpless that ignorance made him in this emergency. "Giving yourself Irish promotion you are," he went on, "but hop to it. Only the ship's settling by the head. And—look!"

He pointed through the chartroom window to the boat deck.

EXCEPT for the watch in the engine room, where the chief engineer was keeping the fireman and oiler at their posts by the persuasion of a two foot spanner, all hands were clustered around the port lifeboat. A six foot fireman, with nothing but a pea jacket thrown over his dungarees, and Louie, waving the belaying pin, towered above the rest, urging the gang to greater speed in preparing the boat for launching. Of the two Louie was the more vehement. A potential murderer, if he can not silence his victim, must escape.

But with every sea breaking clear over the *Sibonia's* bow, flooding her forward deck waist deep with green water, the remainder of the crew were scarcely less anxious to be gone.

"Leave me to handle *them*," said Dennis. "There's a spare hatch cover aft. Fix it up into a collision mat. I'll have a gang ready to place it before you're done."

"I got a gun in my grip," said the second mate somewhat dubiously. "Of course, it ain't loaded—"

Dennis simply grinned and walked out of the charthouse. He sauntered up to the cluster of frantic seamen without so much as doubling his fists.

Louie half raised his belaying pin and stepped to meet him. The fireman, who had signed the ship's articles as John Smith, as good a name as any other, picked a boat stretcher out of the lifeboat and followed.

"We're abandoning ship!" he bellowed.

"Freeze your damned hands and feet off in that boat if you want to, Smith," Dennis retorted. "I want a volunteer with some guts. You for choice, Louie. You claim to be hard."

The big Italian stopped, uncertain.

"Our scrap's been stopped twice," said the little Irishman. "I'm darin' you to go on to the forecastle. Before we pass a couple of lines under the ship we'll find out who's the better man."

"Lines?" repeated Louie, who did not understand.

"If you ain't too yellow to try," Dennis nodded. "Follow me, and I'm forgetting you spoiled my clothes, and the rest of it. You believe that?"

The big Italian did. He didn't like cold or snow, either. He had no wish to leave in the lifeboat unless he had to; what he didn't see was how he was going to fight the mate on a deck waist deep in water.

"The second mate is making a square of canvas that will fit over the leak, see?" Dennis explained. "We tie one edge to the side of the ship. It falls down over the hole, and two thicknesses of No. 1 canvas will keep the water out."

Louie shrugged.

"Da bottom be loose. No good," he pointed out.

"That's where you and me show who's the best man," said Dennis grimly. "We've got to haul that bottom edge tight to the side of the ship. Here's how: On the two bottom corners there's a long rope, weighted with a piece of chain so it'll sink. First we tie the upper corners of the canvas to the rail, right over the hole. Then you take one of the ropes. Me the other. We go into the bow and pass them under the ship. The chain sinks them under the keel, see? Then we run to the port side, haul in, and pull that canvas against the side tighter'n a drum head. If you get your corner secured first I'll give ye best—" Dennis hesitated, and then slapped his right fist into the palm of his left hand— "And what's more, I'll leave this ship, saying nothing,

and you can be bosun in my place. If you're too yellow, I'm going to slam you right now, belaying pin and all!"

Louie shrugged at the threat, tucking the belaying pin into his belt, much as to say there might be two words about that last. But, now that he understood the nature of the contest Dennis proposed, and saw the advantage his greater weight and height would give him, he nodded. Louie wanted to be boatswain. He wanted to see the last of Dennis, too, and had a far greater dread of the mate's fists than of the danger incident to the job on the forecastle.

"Aw, that won't work. The busted edges of the plates will just cut the damn' canvas in half," growled Smith doubtfully, and set about preparing the lifeboat for launching.

Now this was a possibility Dennis couldn't deny. He'd heard of collision mats—all naval ships carry them—but he'd never placed one. He was gambling the thing would work. Gambling his chance to reinstate himself, and his life, maybe—on the strength of two thicknesses of No. 1 canvas.

Louie was keeping the belaying pin handy, and there would be plenty of chance for a treacherous blow in the course of the job.

He had doubts, but he didn't stop to think of them. He slapped Louie on the back, grinning joyously. It wasn't his habit to figure out the odds at the start of a fight. It would be a grand fight, out there on the forecastle. Against the sea. Against a man, maybe. Against this panic stricken, doubting gang trying to abandon ship.

And if he won the battle it would be the old *Sibonia* that would remain afloat, and Captain Arthur who could have warmth and care instead of freezing in an open boat.

Eagerly Dennis lifted the heavy roll of canvas and cordage on to his shoulder and started across the deck.

"Follow me, Louie man," he shouted. "Let bygones be bygones—make out we're doing this for the hell of it!"

SIDE by side they dashed across the well deck as a wave receded. They were on the forecastle and at the rail as the *Sibonia's* nose dipped again. Foam buried them, but when the bow rose they still clung there, Dennis in front, nearest the bow. The mate waved a hand to the spectators on the boat deck, then joined Louie in a frantic effort to lash the canvas in place before the next sea.

The little Irishman's nonchalance was a gesture. He gasped as he worked, spitting the salt water he had swallowed from his throat. Barely had he been able to hold on. The cold was numbing him. Twice, before the canvas was secured, he was buried in water. Each time it seemed to him he was submerged longer; it was a greater effort of will to keep his grip on the rail, harder to spit out the salt which gagged him.

Louie's face was purple. The Italian's eyes rolled in his head. He looked a question as they made the last knot together, shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"Keep going," Dennis gasped. "Hardest is done."

That was a lie. Hauling the canvas into place would be twice as hard. Louie, however, grabbed up chain weighted rope and sloshed through the swirling water toward the bow of the ship. Dennis followed. Already he had lost a second or two over his rival, and his strength was going. He was being beaten. He knew it when the weighted ropes were dropped under the ship, when the two stood by the port rail, hauling the canvas home. Louie's broad shoulders worked like a machine. He gained a foot of line at every heave; while Dennis, pull as he might, gained inches.

"You'd make a good bosun," gasped the Irishman.

"Takes da weight," Louie grunted.

He twisted his head sidewise to speak, and as he looked at the sea beyond Dennis his eyes popped.

"Jump!" he screamed and, dropping the rope, he flung himself on the deck and grasped a ring bolt at Dennis' feet with both hands.

The line that he abandoned commenced to slide over the rail.

Jump was the word. The wave loomed like the side of a house. Fifty yards from the ship, it was coming like an express train, spray volleying before it as the wind tore away its crest. When that struck, no man living could hope to hold a rope. Hands and feet would be needed to keep from being washed aft, or overside. Swiftly Dennis tied his own line fast. He made two half hitches in a split second, yet when he had done the wave was poised above him. Louie, groveling on the deck, looked up in terror.

"Jump!" he mouthed.

But when Dennis jumped it was for that other rope, sliding over the rail, carrying with it the *Sibonia's* chances of remaining afloat, the chance of warmth and care for Captain Arthur.

Did it take a half second to tie it? Who knows? To Dennis and Louie it seemed to take a long, long time. The mate looked around for a hand hold, saw none within reach, snapped his teeth shut and doubled the rope to tie a half hitch. If he completed the knot, he had a rope to cling to. If he didn't, it would be too bad. The tug of the canvas would pull him over the side even if that big sea failed. All Dennis' faculties were intent on the knot. He felt Louie's legs wrap around his knees, tighten desperately. Then the wave dropped. It knocked Dennis to the deck. The impact of his head on the steel dazed him. The rope began to slip through his fingers.

The pressure of water was intolerable. He knew he should be moving swiftly aft, but he wasn't. There was only a ringing in his ears, an intolerable pressure upon his chest. Then there was air to breathe.

Dennis blinked. Above him was the rail. It was the forecastle rail; he knew it because the two ropes were knotted to it. He was lying with his head against Louie's hips. Louie's legs were around him; with one hand Louie held him by the collar.

"Thanks," said Dennis. "Damned if you don't fight like an Irishman, Louie. Get up. There'll be no big seas after that hellion."

"You quick. But too little," gasped Louie.

His black mustache was plastered to his purple face. His chest heaved, for his strength had been taxed to the utmost, but he was grinning from ear to ear.

"We square?" he ended.

"I'll say we're square," said Dennis. "Come on, Bosun—let's haul in that canvas."

And they did.

IT WAS dawn when the gale blew itself out. The snow had ceased in the night, the sun rose red and clear as the *Sibonia* rounded Ambrose Channel lightship and staggered into the port of New York for repairs. She was down by the head. There was a ten foot patch of canvas on her starboard bow, but a sea going tug which steamed alongside in the hope of salvage was sent away. The *Sibonia* made the repair yard under her own steam.

On the dock the superintendent was waiting. He hurried aboard and went directly to Captain Arthur's cabin.

"Got your SOS. Never looked to see you. Eighty mile gale last night," he rapped out.

The superintendent took pride in his quick decisions and had trained himself into a staccato habit of speech to correspond.

"Hole in bow not serious. Saw Carty—man you wanted as second mate. Seemed to be giving orders. What's the story?"

Arthur fingered the bandage around his head.

"I brought Dennis along as bosun, after you'd fired him," he began.

"Called a big Italian bosun in my hearing," contradicted superintendent. "Noticed it. Seemed like the wop this Carty half killed."

"He is, but they're good friends now," replied the old skipper gently. "The two of them placed that canvas patch. A big sea came along, and Louie kept Dennis from going over the side. It was

Dennis who thought of a collision mat and kept us from sinking."

"Hm!" said the superintendent. His eyes bored into the other, and he waited for the whole story.

"I was knocked out by the first sea," Arthur went on, "and didn't come to until they had that mat placed. The first thing I saw with my own eyes was Dennis and Louie running back off the forecastle. We were pretty deep down by the head, and the men were all abandoning ship. A big fireman, named Smith, had a boat all ready to launch. I wasn't able to get up and, of course, our mates being new—"

"Quite so. Been to sea myself. Officer sailors don't know hasn't more authority than any man-jack aboard," snapped the superintendent. "Go on."

"Dennis looked pretty weak to me," the captain resumed, "but he walked up to this fireman, with Louie trudging along behind.

" 'Secure that boat!' Dennis said. The fireman told him to go to hell, and the other men were of the same mind."

"See they're here," said the superintendent. "Don't tell me he licked the whole gang!"

"I doubt if he could have licked Smith, right at that minute. You know how it is, when there's a gang with a ringleader? No use giving orders and, of course, if you try strong arm stuff and don't knock the ringleader out, the rest jump you. Well, Dennis was going to try. But as he stepped up to Smith, Louie took a belaying pin out of his belt and slipped it into Dennis' hand.

"Dennis tapped Smith over the head with that, and—well, the others secured the lifeboat. When Smith came to he talked a lot. Called Dennis a little squirt who had to have a club to fight, and all that. But you know. That was just talk."

"Yep," said the superintendent, and drummed on the captain's desk with his fingers. "Saw that fireman going ashore. Head tied up. Dennis followed him down the gangplank." The superintendent's fingers continued their tattoo. "Want Dennis for second mate, don't you?" he snapped unexpectedly. "I never reverse a decision. Can't have an officer who beats up men. Penitentiary offense."

Captain Arthur leaned forward earnestly.

"Dennis has learned his lesson, sir," he declared. "I had a long talk with him this morning, and he promised he wouldn't fight any more. Of course, by handling Louie as he did, he made a first rate petty officer out of a seaman who was nothing but a tough, but I'm not pleading that, sir. Dennis is a pugnacious man, of course, but a captain, such as he will be soon, doesn't come into such direct contact with the crew. Besides, I know Dennis had learned there are other things than men to fight. He knows he's won a chance to be reinstated, and he promised me solemnly this morning—"

There was a shout outside. The men on the *Sibonia's* deck ran to the side next the dock, and Captain Arthur and the superintendent went to the window to discover what had happened. There was a louder shout from the dock side, the crew turned back to their duties, and up the gangplank walked Dennis Carty.

Blood was running from a freshly split lip. Under his eye was a puffy bruise, rapidly turning black, but his step was gay and jaunty. Dennis had vindicated himself. Down on the dock those lucky enough to see the fight were bringing Smith back to consciousness. The scrap had lasted less than one round, and Dennis had not used a club.

"Promised solemnly, did he?" said the superintendent. For the first time in Captain Arthur's memory he chuckled. "Captain, any man who can save a ship worth half a million by fighting, we can afford to let fight. The salvage money Dennis Carty has kept in our pockets will pay his fines for a hundred years, as second mate or captain, and captain he shall be when you retire. But we'll ask no more promises." The superintendent resumed his curt manner. "Not fair to make Carty liable to a charge of perjury as well as assault and battery, sir. Promise? Nonsense. The man's Irish."

WITH *the* HELP *of the* ENEMY

A Complete Novelette

By THOMSON BURTIS

The feud of two flying officers of the Border Air Patrol

SECOND LIEUTENANT BRUCE WAYNE, often known as Brick, got off the dusty train and surveyed the crowded platform of the McMullen station as Moses might have gazed at the promised land. The flourishing town on the Texas Border, he observed, maintained the old Southern custom of turning out to watch the train come in.

The flyer was tall enough to look over the heads of the crowd, and in a moment he picked up a stocky chap in the uniform of the Army Service. He knew the McMullen flyers, having landed there at various times.

Wayne was in civilian clothes, but they failed to camouflage completely the ranginess of his slender body. Lanky and lean faced, he moved through the crowd with a sort of loose, unhurried slowness. He gave the effect of utter physical repose.

As his eyes met those of Spears, however, that young gentleman was considerably surprised at what he saw. He had always thought of Brick Wayne as a nonchalant chap who could not be seriously roused by anything. Consequently, the zestful sparkle in the tall young airman's eyes was like seeing the twinkle of a diamond in a piece of rubber. The eyes were very large and very blue and seemed to be windows which provided a glimpse into an eager spirit entirely at variance with his deliberate body.

"Hello, Wayne," the McMullen flyer said with his slow smile. "Let's have the bag. There's a Stuttering Six around here somewhere. I suppose it's in order to extend my sympathy."

"Huh? Why?" grinned Wayne.

He was looking around at the animated spectacle of the station with eyes that

glowed. Booted Texans, smartly dressed business men, negroes, Mexicans—it was a Border scene.

"Hell, you're not tickled to death at giving up the cinch job you had at Donovan Field to steer DeHavilands over the mesquite, are you?" inquired Sleepy.

Wayne had to repress what would have been an exultant yes. He was aware of the fact that he was like a kid with a new toy, but he wouldn't let the hard boiled old-timers of McMullen know it.

"It'll be a change," he drawled.

His Mississippi brogue was as thick as cream and as slow as the flow of glue. Stocky, somnolent Spears, whose heavy lidded eyes always seemed slumberous except when excitement was imminent, was thinking—

"For once I guess we've drawn a prize out of the raffle, in spite of what Burdick's been saying."

They were about to climb into the battered Dodge when the hum of two airplane motors grew into a drone overhead. Spears glanced westward, and suddenly his square, tanned face was serious.

"I guess they didn't find him," he remarked.

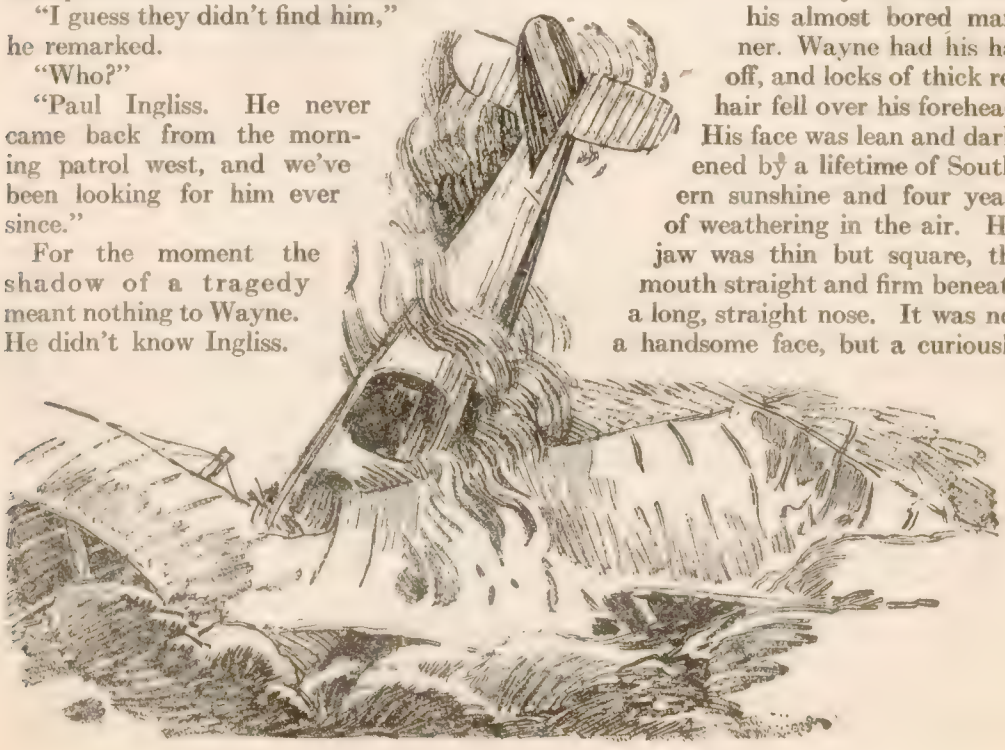
"Who?"

"Paul Ingliss. He never came back from the morning patrol west, and we've been looking for him ever since."

For the moment the shadow of a tragedy meant nothing to Wayne. He didn't know Ingliss. Rather, it seemed that Spears' words had deepened his feeling of satisfaction. That was the Border patrol—romance and danger and high adventure every day. The most glamourous duty a flyer could perform, to him was the daily routine of the pilots who sent their D.H.'s roaring up and down the Rio Grande, from gulf to gulf, like advance riders for civilization.

BOTH flyers were silent as they drove down the wide main street of the city. McMullen, a combination of the frontier and the metropolitan, was summed up for the observant Wayne by the sight of a gray headed giant in cowboy boots, spurs, and flannel shirt, climbing out of a three thousand dollar car.

Sleepy was one of the nucleus of famous veterans who helped make the Border patrol the most famous flying organization since the Lafayette Escadrille, and he had seen many a flyer come and go. He stole frequent looks at the lounging airman beside him whose spirit was so evidently at odds with his almost bored manner. Wayne had his hat off, and locks of thick red hair fell over his forehead. His face was lean and darkened by a lifetime of Southern sunshine and four years of weathering in the air. His jaw was thin but square, the mouth straight and firm beneath a long, straight nose. It was not a handsome face, but a curiously



charming one, and when those wide set blue eyes burned out at one there was the unmistakable feel of a definite personality.

"He's always been known as a good egg except according to Burdick," Sleepy thought, "and, being one of God's gifts to the art of flying, that makes everything hunkydory."

They tore through the Mexican quarter of the town as the two huge bombers were settling to earth, a mile westward. Brick watched them come down as if the mere fact that they were being flown by Border pilots made the landings uniquely perfect. They had scarcely dipped out of sight before the car emerged from the outskirts of the town within sight of the field. Two corrugated iron hangars were baking in the sun on the eastern edge, and at right angles to them was a line of white buildings. Beyond them were small square tents, one of which would be his dwelling for a long time to come, Brick hoped. He would choose one, the way he felt now, in preference to Buckingham Palace.

"What a damn' fool I am!" he thought to himself happily.

As they swung into the field and up the road which divided the airdrome from the line of buildings, Sleepy said suddenly—

"Something's up!"

He twirled the wheel dizzily, and the car swerved out on the field in a sharp curve. Wayne saw that eight or ten officers and several enlisted men were grouped around one of the D.H.'s. As they got closer he saw activity around the cockpit.

"Ingliss's body, as sure as hell!"

Sleepy said that slowly as he brought the car to a stop. He got out and walked slowly toward the silent group of flyers. Brick, shadows in his eyes, walked slowly behind him. He did not want to thrust himself forward at such a time, and he stood in the rear, as a corpse was lifted gently from the rear cockpit of the ship. It had been covered by a sheet, but Brick could not help seeing a portion of what had been a leg. The charred boot was still there, but above it clothing and flesh had been burned away. It was lifted into the waiting ambulance. The flight surgeon closed the door and got in with the driver.

"I'll make absolutely sure at the hospital, Captain," he said as he polished his glasses vigorously.

THE FLYERS were talking to one another in low tones, and their faces were bewildered as well as serious. Wayne felt himself tense as he lounged forward. Sleepy was with Tex MacDowell and Captain Kennard.

"Hello, Wayne," the stubby little C. O. barked sharply. "You sure picked a good day to get here. That was all that was left of one of our flyers—Ingliss."

"Cracked up and burned, eh?" Wayne asked as he shook hands.

The flyers greeted him in a daze. MacDowell's eyes were brooding and dark; and Jimmy Jennings, slim and handsome, was trembling as he extended his hand.

"Yes," Sleepy said slowly. "Neither of which, however, killed him."

"There were four machine gun bullet holes in his skull," Captain Kennard said simply.

Brick's long neck, rising like a column from his casual white collar, seemed to become flushed and to expand. His eyes darted from man to man, and quick excitement surged within him.

"He was shot down, you mean?" he asked. "Another airplane, eh?"

Kennard nodded.

"He had the dawn patrol, and has been dead about nine hours, the doc said," he answered in his deep voice; his stubby hand, fingers widespread, was going back and forth through his stiff brush pompadour. "Well, we can't stand here. We've got to get the world looking for a strange airplane! Tex, you say there wasn't a house within miles—"

"No, sir," the tall Texan answered, "And he'd shot a few rounds of his own ammunition drum."

"If he'd spotted a ship and tried to

force it to land, he'd have shot more rounds than he did," Kennard said harshly, "unless their gun was concealed and took him by surprise. It looks to me more like a cold blooded attack on him than anything else. Either they shot him down in cold blood rather than land, or they just hopped on him from behind out of the clouds. And what the reason for that—"

"He was shot from behind, Doc said," Jimmy Jennings broke in shrilly. "Bullets entered from the rear."

Wayne was on fire, mind and body.

"His hand might have tightened on the gun control when he was shot," he suggested, forcing himself to be calm. "The clouds were low this morning up north. God, Captain, you don't mean to say that somebody just hopped on him from the clouds and shot him down for no reason!"

"I haven't seen the wreck," Kennard said harshly, pulling at his hair. His scarred face was black.

"Tex saw the wreck and the doc examined the body," he went on, as if to himself, "and they agree that just what you've said is what probably happened."

The group of which Wayne was a part was moving slowly across the airdrome, shimmering in the hot sun, at the head of a procession of airmen. Brick lighted a cigaret with a hand that shook.

"But a smuggling ship would try to get away, keep out of sight," he protested. "If it was in a position to get Ingliss without his having a chance to fight back it could have skipped away without shooting."

"Sure," Sleepy Spears agreed, head down and eyes on the ground. "Which is what makes it look so peculiar."

"Did Ingliss have enemies? I didn't know him—"

"Hadn't been on the Border a week," snapped Captain Kennard.

THEY had reached the steps of headquarters, and there they were joined by the half dozen other flyers and observers. Wayne shook hands briefly, his mind racing along on subjects far from "How do you do." Big blond George Hickman, fat little Dumpy Scarth, Jack Beaman, Slim Evans, the human flagpole—he had met them all once before.

Slim Evans was six feet six, but the square acreage of his body was less than the normal man's because he was the thinnest mortal outside of a museum. When he talked he gestured with disconnected, casual motions which made his long arms flap around ludicrously.

"It wasn't so long ago we had a flying nut around these parts," he stated to the world at large, "but he didn't pick on us. Suppose the boy friend of some of our outlaw opponents has gone nutty and is out to pot us, one by one?"

"I don't know, but I've got to get busy. It's murder, sure as hell!" With that the little C. O. stumped up the stairs and into his office.

"Here comes your stuff," Spears said as a truck came into the airdrome. "Come on. I'll show your your tent."

Wayne hated to leave the absorbed discussion which was going on in low tones among the khaki clad figures. As the two started there came a faraway drone from the east; a patrol ship was coming in from the Gulf of Mexico.

Brick said little to Sleepy, for his mind was ranging free and far as he constructed large edifices on the foundation of the murder of Ingliss. He was visualizing a many sided plot, such as the Border patrol had fought before. It might be, as Slim Evans suggested, that there was another raving maniac ranging the sky, the foe of the patrol.

"Don't let this get your goat," Spears was saying casually as they turned down the boardwalk between the two tent rows.

"God, no!" Brick's drawl was back again. "A thing like this couldn't happen anywhere else, could it?" He drew in his breath. "Looks as though we'd have to keep our eyes peeled and do some aerial hunting, doesn't it?"

"You don't seem to hate the prospect," Sleepy told him, studying him curiously.

Wayne grinned and his eyes were afire.

"I don't guess I do," he admitted.

The two hours before dinner sped like lightning as he arranged his stuff absent mindedly. The smell of sand and mesquite drifted in under the rolled up canvas walls of his tent and as the quick Texas twilight fell the feel of the Southwest was in the whispering breeze.

When the dinner bell rang he hastily put on his blouse, made a couple of passes at his unruly red hair and went out into the purple dusk. For a moment he stood there, drinking in the moonlit scene. Northward the chaparral stretched away for hundreds of miles; southward was the Rio Grande. His imagination leaped along the Border—Laredo, Del Rio, Marfa, Sanderson, on out to Nogales and Yuma and Rockwell Field. A half dozen isolated little airdromes buried in the Big Bend, alongside the deserts of the Far West, a few near towns—those were the flights of the Border patrol, watching the tempestuous strip of country as their forebears, the Rangers, had done. He had left behind him comfortable quarters, and the lights of cities and civilized country. In their place was the brooding mesquite, hiding within its depths unknown dangers, human and inanimate. Just that day Ingliss . . .

But Brick Wayne would rather be where he was than any other place on earth.

AS HE entered the messhall he saw that all chairs were occupied but two. One was for him. The other one, its dishes turned down, was the empty chair of the man gone west that day.

"Hello, Wayne," rotund, baldheaded Pop Cravath greeted him.

"That's your chair, next to Sleepy's," Captain Kennard said from the head of the table. "You know Burdick, don't you?"

Before the words were out of the captain's mouth Brick had seen Burdick. He stopped motionless for a second, as if a stunning blow had paralyzed him. His blue eyes widened, and every man at the table could see them blaze coldly. His thin face flushed, and suddenly his throat felt parched.

"Chute Burdick, huh?" he managed to say finally as he went blindly to his seat. "When did you get ordered here?"

The dark first lieutenant grinned slightly, triumph in his hard black eyes.

"Almost a month ago," he said briefly.

The other airmen commenced to talk casually, but their eyes flitted frequently from Burdick to Wayne. The animosity between the two was as obvious as if their minds were open to public inspection. Brick ate silently with his eyes on his plate most of the time. Across from him Burdick talked expansively, and there was exaggerated ease and geniality in his manner. He was gloating over Wayne's discomfiture, and Brick knew it. There was raging fury within him, mixed with dread.

If the past was any criterion, his dreams of a place on the Border patrol were dust then and there.

The conversation, to which he scarcely listened, ran to the probable murder of Paul Ingliss. Toward the end of the meal, however, Wayne heard Slim Evans holding forth.

"It sure would be hell if some guy with a grudge against us was doing an aerial range riding stunt—you know, the old gag of the boy who runs around nights potting his enemies, or the enemies of his tribe or family. And you've got to remember that we've knocked off a hell of a lot of smugglers and such who had big gangs behind 'em."

"Hell, we'll be flying patrols without ever seeing the ground," commented Pop Cravath, the rotund adjutant. "We'll be watching for some boy to pop down out of a cloud, massaging us with bullets."

"You might consider how you'll pound your ear, too," suggested Tex MacDowell. "If these Diamond Dick ideas should happen to be anywhere near the truth, this bozo might get the bright idea of shooting up an airdrome some night."

Wayne's mind was divided between what was being said and Burdick. He was conscious that the latter's eyes were gloating over him, mocking him, and that they were rarely absent from his face.

Sleepy Spears, next to him, was equally aware of Wayne's ordeal, and he did little talking, devoting himself to observation.

It seemed to Brick that every lineament of the dark face before him was burned into his mind, and that it would be the most vivid mental image of his lifetime. From a distance, Burdick would pass as an exceptionally good looking man. He had Latin blood in his veins, it appeared, because his thick hair was black and oily, and his skin as dark as a Mexican's. His nose jutted forward, boldly aquiline, and his profile was strong and clean cut.

Close up, however, he was far less attractive. His skin seemed slightly muddy, almost dirty, and his narrow black eyes were as hard looking as black marble, and as opaque. They always seemed to be rimmed with red, too, like a buzzard's. What was strength and determination, at a distance, became something savage and repelling upon close inspection.

"Everybody in the recreation room at ten!" Pop Cravath reminded them.

Brick didn't wait to ask about the order; he felt he must get by himself and think things out. As he was the first one out the door, Burdick's loud laugh followed him as if mocking.

"HEY, BRICK!" came Sleepy Spears' voice from the porch, and Brick stopped to allow the indolent young gentleman to catch up with him.

The tawny headed Sleepy was a man of wide experience, and no fool.

"Just because you're a new man," he stated casually, "I'm going to give you a drink of brandy as a followup of that awful food. It's excellent for the digestion."

"Thanks," Brick said absently.

He was trying to figure out what he should do. He must do something quickly, must take definite action right away if he wanted to remain on the Border patrol. That he knew, for he knew Burdick.

Sleepy suffered with periodic fits of ambition, which usually took the form of ordering correspondence school courses on wide and varied subjects. Consequently his tent was lined with unopened boxes of cultural books. He had always recovered from his temporary aberration by the time the books arrived and so he never read them. He seated himself on one of the educational boxes, but Brick, glass in hand, stayed on his feet.

"It doesn't look as though you and Chute Burdick were very good friends," Sleepy remarked casually.

For a second Brick hesitated. Then the sheer necessity of relieving his feelings forced him on.

"If the way I feel toward that guy is merely dislike," he drawled with venom in his voice, "what I feel for a rattlesnake is love. You call him Chute down here too, eh? He must be carrying his private umbrella then."

"Uh-huh. And a sensible guy, too. If I had the dough I'd buy one myself. The day'll come when every flyer wears one. Wait and see. There'll be a panic among the undertakers. I wish I could afford to buy me a chute right now."

Spears sipped his drink, and then went on:

"I don't want to butt in, but what's the trouble? I hate to see a couple of fellows in that shape in a small flight like this."

"I won't be here long, if Chute can arrange it. I've been kicked out of three jobs on account of him already."

"Huh?" grunted the surprised Spears.

The feeling in Wayne's voice snapped him into absorbed attention. Suddenly the rangy flyer stopped in front of him.

"Listen, Sleepy," he said very slowly. His drawl was thicker than ever, but his blue eyes were ablaze with repressed feeling and his shock of red hair seemed to bristle. "You're the closest thing I've got to a friend down here. I guess I can shoot off my mouth to you without being a cry baby. I'm not after help. I need advice. If you'll give me your word of honor that not a word I say will ever be spread to anybody, any time, I'd like to tell you something."

"O. K.," nodded Spears.

"All right. That fellow hates me like poison, and I despise him. When I was a cadet, he was a stage commander. Maybe I was a little fresh, but he was the hardest boiled stage commander a cadet ever had."

"Which is saying plenty," nodded Spears.

"He took a dislike to me and tried to frame me into being busted out. He didn't get away with it. You know how tough it was for cadets between these damn' ground officers and the rest—well, Burdick was the worst of the lot."

"I've heard other people say that," Spears said quietly.

More at ease since he had started to talk, Brick's mouth widened in a bitter smile.

"One time he was going to show a bunch of us how to sideslip into a field. Said we didn't come down low enough before leveling off. He slipped his ship right into the ground, and we cheered because we thought he'd been killed. We were disappointed as hell when he wasn't."

He tossed off the last of his drink and sat down.

"I got through in spite of him. Then I got to Sherry Field, and was officer in charge of flying. He got ordered there too. We had a few good ships. Burdick starts trying to add me to his throne gang then, suggesting that we restrict the good ships to ourselves and not let anybody but the insiders fly 'em. When I refused he started to get me. By every kind of riding, political wire pulling, lying and plain crookedness that higher rank and a lot of boot licking can accomplish, he made it so damn' uncomfortable I had to ask for transfer.

"Let me tell you this. He's got some *dinero*, you know. Well, he's the cleverest politician in this man's Army. He kisses the foot of every C. O. to a white heat, invites the higher rankers on parties, organizes his throne gang, and comes near to running the works on every big field he's hit. He gets away with it because he's a damn' efficient officer and the hardest worker in the army."

"Which isn't saying much," grinned Spears.

"Anyway, before I left," Brick went on in his soft brogue, "I told him what I thought of him. Slapped his face for him besides. Then I ran into him almost a year ago up at Donovan. He'd sure set himself solid there. And he got me fired out of the biggest job I'd ever held—not for inefficiency but because he and I couldn't get along and he held the aces. As a result of that, damned if I don't get appointed the general's private pilot, the best job in the whole department. Which almost broke Chute's heart. Right then and there he came out in the open. He was nuts about a girl—I didn't know it and she wasn't strong for him—and I took her away from him at a dance. Bee Nolan—maybe you know her."

"No, I don't. He's still a chippy-chaser. He's playing a girl in town strong."

"I wouldn't trust him with my grandmother. Anyway, if he was against me before, he started hating me then and trying to ruin me. I won't go into the details on that. But as far as official duty was concerned, he started his machine going the second I got that job. More lies floated to the general than you ever heard in your life. Had a forced landing with the *Bluebird* on a test flight one day. Had to land at the commercial field. I know for a fact that it came straight to the colonel that I was taking a girl up in his pet ship. I'm under a cloud in this man's Army, all because of him and his lies.

"No need of yapping any more about it, though. The nub of the proposition is that he hates me, is out to get me kicked right out of the Army by any method he can, that he's smart and powerful because of friends he's bought with liquor and parties from the chief's office down, that he hasn't got the morals of a cross between a New York gunman and a rabbit, outranks me and can outfight me because he doesn't care what weapons he uses."

BRICK WAYNE'S speech had grown more rapid as he proceeded, and his fists were tight shut when he had finished. Memories of months of unhappiness, of walking perilously along the cliff of undeserved disgrace, surged hotly through his mind. He got to his feet and took a turn around the tiny tent. He seemed all legs in an army uniform, but his short torso spread sturdily from a small waist to shoulders which were more than proportionate to his height.

Spears smoked tranquilly, watching him. Vague rumors about Burdick had sifted through to the isolated McMullen flight and, in the light of Wayne's words, a few things which had happened in the last month seemed clearer. The big party Burdick had thrown for the flight in Mexico, for instance, and the rapidity and lavishness with which he had carved himself a niche among McMullen's elite.

"I'll bet—I'm not asking or wanting an answer—that he's got me in bad through propaganda already," Brick went on, brushing the hair back from his eyes.

"Er, no," Sleepy assured him, but it was only a half truth.

It had been done subtly, the veteran realized now. Of Wayne's flying ability no one could say anything derogatory. His record was there for all to read, and his last job, as the general's pilot and flight commander, was an accolade. But Spears realized that the flight had received the impression that Wayne was a conceited, bull headed ass, and a very poor officer with a terrific temper.

"And don't worry, kid," Spears went on in his deceptively somnolent manner. "You'll get a square deal from the cap. He's no kid. If you and Burdick can't find room enough in this flight, it'll just be a question of which one the cap can use best. It's up to you."

Suddenly Wayne threw down his cigaret.

"I'm going to find out about a square deal from Chute Burdick right now!" he exploded. "Thanks for the drink. What's his tent number?"

"12. But listen, now—"

Wayne was gone.

AS HE strode swiftly up the boardwalk he could see a light in No. 12. He stopped, striving to collect himself. His eyes swept the scene greedily. Lights winked out from the corners of hangars, and the tents were two rows of dimmed illumination. High in the sky rode a full moon, and the Gulf breeze was whispering the mysteries of the wilderness. For months he had begged and pleaded and worked for this opportunity to join the blue ribbon outfit of the Service, but as he stood there he was as sure that he was doomed as a Border patrolman. Burdick had never failed, and Wayne felt helpless in his hands.

His memories combined with heartbreaking disappointment, and suddenly the result was an ungovernable fury which sent him into Tent 12 without announcing himself and with a look in his eyes which was not good to see.

Burdick was at a small desk, poring over a book which looked like a ledger. As he saw Wayne he closed it carefully and put it aside. His eyes looked the younger man up and down contemptuously.

Brick was outwardly under control, as he always was in emergencies, but inwardly every sense was preternaturally keen and every nerve jumping.

"Well, Chute," he drawled very slowly, choosing his words, "I see we're playmates again."

"Yes, damn it!" Burdick answered harshly, and grinned meaningly.

"You don't seem to mind the prospect. In fact, you look as though you enjoyed it," Wayne told him.

His eyes never left those of Burdick, nor did his enemy's waver. It was like a duel.

"It usually works out that one of us leaves before long," Burdick stated.

"And that one," Wayne said with ominous care, "is always me."

"Is always you," agreed Burdick.

Wayne took a step forward and leaned down over the desk. Burdick did not give ground. He did not even lean back. His eyes stared defiantly into his enemy's.

"But this time," Brick said, holding himself under control, "there's going to be another deal. You won't get away with anything!"

"What do you mean?"

"You know damn' well what I mean!"

Wayne's calm broke. Suddenly Burdick was on his feet, as if Wayne's choked words were an explosion which had blown him there. Their chests were almost touching as Wayne poured his hot words into Burdick's face.

"For four years, off and on, you've been making life a hell for me by every form of frame, double cross and lousy lies that a skunk like you can think up! Don't climb up on your bars, damn' you! I know you're almost a captain—but we're man to man now."

"That's enough out of you, you pup! Get out of this!"

"When I get damn' good and ready I will. Now you listen to me, Chute Burdick, and do yourself some good. You've got rank and you've got dough and you've got power that you've bought and boot-licked your way into. Nobody knows what this Army can be any better than me. There've been a lot of months in the last four years when it's been a machine with you working it, grinding me to pieces. And it can be that way again.

"But you get me, and get me right, I'm no tale bearer, like you are, and I'd cut off my tongue before I'd run to Kennard, no matter what you did. But if you start any of your dirty work, and I'm kicked off this Border because of you, do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to resign, if I have to, but I'm going to beat your damn' head off! And when you get out of the hospital I'm going to kick you back in!

"You remember that I can't fight you officially, or I won't. But I can make you cry for mercy on your knees and wish to God you'd never been born!"

For a few seconds Burdick just stood there. It seemed that the tirade, backed by a man on fire, had stunned him. Deep in his shiny black eyes there was a flickering little flame, and they stared into Wayne's unwinkingly. It was as if he were looking through him and calculating.

Then he came out of his trance. His dark face was flushed, and his words were coldly vicious.

"Get the hell out of here! I'll get you for this, redhead, and don't think I won't. Get out before I throw you out."

"God, I wish you'd try!"

"And any day you don't think I can lick hell out of you—"

"Don't forget," Wayne told him softly. Some of the mad fury had left him, but his emotions had been hardened in the heat of his rage. "I've said my piece, Chute. From now on you'll be treated with respect by me, and I won't open my mouth.

"But the day I get sent off the Border, if I even *think* it was because of you, is the day that you can start using some of the dough you spend so freely hiring a bodyguard!"

SURPRISINGLY, Lieutenant Sleepy Spears was dawdling in the vicinity of tent No. 12 up toward the end of the boardwalk.

"Nice chat?" he inquired casually.

"Great," Brick said grimly. "Listen, Spears. Remember you gave me your word that you won't mention anything whatever about any feud between Burdick and me."

Sleepy nodded.

"Sure," he said indifferently. "Coming over to the shack?"

They went over to the recreation room, where poker and bridge games were in progress. The hot headed Southerner felt relieved, now that he had had a showdown with Burdick, and he accepted a hand in the poker game. Occasionally he would steal a look around at the relaxed airmen. Not a man of them but had had his name spread across the papers within the last year, the busiest year of the patrol's history. They were known almost from coast to coast. And yet they seemed to keep themselves aloof from the world, as if their own little group was all sufficient. The pride he took in being an airman was

as nothing to the pride he felt in being one of them—and he'd stay one despite hell, high water and Chute Burdick.

There were frequent drinks, preparing for the midnight ceremony in honor of Ingliss. At eleven thirty Burdick came in, and automatically Brick felt self-conscious and uncomfortable. The presence of his enemy and the consciousness of the feeling between them poisoned the very atmosphere for him.

He forgot even Burdick though, as midnight, El Paso time, was only seconds away. Every flyer on the Border, at that same minute, was getting to his feet. Glasses were filled, and the airmen were standing as they watched Captain Kennard lift his own glass high, eyes on his watch. There was almost a full minute of silence. He felt that the pounding of his heart could be heard, and his throat was tight, somehow. Midnight, and the captain's voice rang out:

"Here's to the sands of the hourglass
Measuring time as it flies;
Here's to the man gone west today
And here's to the next man that dies!"

Wayne's imagination was leaping the Border as he drank, seeing in his mind's eye the flyers from Laredo to Rockwell Field drinking to the next one. One out of eight got killed every year.

"Fill 'em up!"

In a few seconds a ribald toast, laughing off the gravity of the moment, was being tossed off. And as the tall redhead stumbled to his tent that night his mind was a chaos, a queer mixture of happiness, foreboding and anticipation. He fell asleep thinking of the momentary glimpse he had had of Burdick, as the second toast had been completed. The dark officer had been standing in revery, face set and eyes staring into nothingness.

BRICK WAYNE was the last man in the messhall next morning and, as he entered, the rest of the flight were all at work with knives and forks and tongues. Wayne's eyes found Burdick. Burdick stared back, a sardonic smile on his face.

"Here's Wayne," he rasped. "Maybe he can—almost certainly he can—figure out just who it is."

"Who who is?" Wayne inquired very slowly.

Damn that nervous feeling when he was around Burdick! He was too sensitive.

"The guy that knocked off Paul Ingliss did a little more work on the dawn patrol!" Kennard told him grimly.

"Huh? Where? Who?" stammered Wayne.

"Jack Killey of the Marfa flight," Kennard stated. "He didn't get killed, either. Just by luck another ship was flying to El Paso and saw his wreck and got him. Pretty badly hurt. Says a small, two seated ship, quite fast, just swooped out of nowhere on his tail, shot him down and climbed out of sight into the mist!"

"What—what do you think the pilot is up to?" Wayne asked slowly.

After years on flying fields, with no experience in France behind him, it seemed like a dream. There was an aerial enemy, pouncing like a hawk on Border ships, and every time he took the air he must be prepared to fight.

"There isn't any doubt in my mind," Pop Cravath said soberly. "I think it's one of Von Sternberg's buddies who's out to revenge what we've done to his chief. that's what I think!"

"Either that, or a flyer gone nuts," agreed Slim Evans.

"Von Sternberg, he's the German ace now in Mexico that does a lot of airplane smuggling, isn't he?" Brick asked eagerly.

"Right," Sleepy told him. "He's got a gang of hundreds of peons and flyers and what not, and a lot of power. Or did have. We've had three brushes with him and his men and won each time. Once we got him, you remember, but he escaped. We've knocked off a bunch of his boys, all right, and we aren't sure that he's alive himself."

"I think it's one of his men!" boomed little Penoch O'Reilly in his foghorn voice. "I know Von Sternberg personally," he explained to the absorbed Brick. "He's a

big, blond, handsome devil, and a lot of his pals would go to hell and back for him. I believe we must have hurt him bad in that last little fight that Slim and Duke Daly had with him—maybe he's dead. Anyway, some fanatical follower of his is just retaliating on us for Von Sternberg flyers we've killed. "I—"

"You don't think it could be Von Sternberg himself?" snapped Kennard.

The captain was attacking his grapefruit as if it were the unknown pilot.

"No," O'Reilly answered, twirling his tiny little moustache thoughtfully. "Von wouldn't do that. He'd put over something big. Some nut follower of his—"

"Forget not, brethren," Slim Evans cut in, "that this bözo can do a lot dirtier tricks than he has if he's got the guts. That shooting up an airdrome thing, for instance."

Wayne sat silently as they discussed the matter. The glowering captain added a cup of coffee to his grapefruit and got up.

"As soon as orders are out on this thing there'll be an officers' meeting," he said shortly. "Paul Ingliss' father and mother are due here this afternoon. Damn the luck that had 'em in San Antone when this happened. Tougher for them and tougher for us. Stick around the field except for patrols, everybody. I'm recommending that two scouts be assigned every flight for guard duty. I'll be damned if we're supposed to go out and fly patrols like decoy ducks for some thug of a hunter!"

"Wayne! I want to see you in my office as soon as you're through breakfast."

"Yes, sir."

Kennard's words seemed to hold a threat in them, somewhere. Wayne looked at Burdick. He was staring at Wayne, and to the junior flyer it seemed that there was again triumph in his eyes.

NOT EVEN the mystery of the unknown aerial murderer could take Brick's mind from Burdick. He simply could not be himself with that man around, knowing that Burdick was hating him, plotting to destroy him. He gulped half of his food and hurried over to headquarters where he reported to Kennard, who was just concluding a rapid fire series of orders to a clerk writing furiously.

"Come in, Wayne," he ordered. "Shut the door."

Kennard leaned forward, his elbows on the desk, and his square face was stern. His raucous voice rasped out at his subordinate, and the words were crisply final.

"Wayne, I understand that you and Burdick haven't got along well in the past, and that you celebrated your coming here by going in and telling him just what you were and weren't going to do. Regardless of his rank, that stuff don't go here. You and Burdick will get along here, or out you go. And don't you shoot off your mouth, either. You're trying to carry on the old feud. You've tried to start it again. Either you quit, or out you go. This post is too small to have a couple of officers at swords' points. Burdick ranks you, is a good officer, though whether he is or not is none of your business. Hell's liable to pop down here any second. It looks as if it was popping now. You'll have all you can tend to fighting outlaws. Furthermore, I won't tolerate any internal friction in this outfit.

"Another thing—"

He leaned forward and shook an admonitory finger at his flushed flyer. Brick, sick at heart, said nothing. What a dirty tattling liar Burdick was!

"You were the general's pilot for awhile. I don't give a damn, and nobody else here does, whether you flew the President. You're supposed to be a crack pilot. I hope you are, but that doesn't mean anything either. Probably half the men in this flight have had double the number of hours you have, and could lick you in a dogfight without taking the cigarets out of their mouths. You may have been in the throne gang up around the fields, but you're just an amateur on the Border patrol. So if you think you're good, forget it. You haven't shown us

yet. That's all. Mind your own business, work like hell, fly like hell, and forget Burdick, and we'll get along all right. If you don't, we'll send you back to the San Antone tea parties and the admiration of the San Antone debutantes. Tell Sergeant Baker to come in when you go out."

IT WAS a hard job to keep tears of baffled rage from his eyes as he left the office. Already Burdick was at work. He was playing the same role which had made Brick's life miserable on other posts. He was like a cunning devil in the background, whispering, cutting the ground from under the subordinate he disliked. It was like fighting an intangible force which Brick could not touch.

His ordeal on the ground was far worse than the two daily patrols he had to fly. Burdick became an obsession for he never gave Brick an opportunity to forget him. He was infinitely more important in the life of the young flyer than was the unknown bandit.

As Brick walked toward the line on the fifth morning after his arrival at McMullen, he knew he was to fly, but what he was thinking of was not the possibility of running into trouble. It was that he was to fly protection for Burdick.

"I wouldn't cry if that thug potted him!" he was thinking to himself.

During the delay between Kennard's suggestion of scout ships to protect the clumsy DeHavilands and the arrival of the single seaters, two more ships had been attacked, near El Paso, and one flyer killed. Every human being on the Border was enlisted to watch for a strange airplane and promptly notify the nearest patrol flight. The airmen were flying double patrols, each one of them two and a half hours of drawn suspense.

Brick glanced at the graying sky. It was barely dawn. Dark mist hung like a solid ceiling, two or three thousand feet high, and beneath it isolated clouds drifted slowly along in front of the Gulf breeze.

"It's his kind of weather," Brick thought. "He seems to be working the western part of the country pretty steadily, though."

General opinion had agreed on there being but one possible explanation of the lone flyer's activities. He was an outlaw, probably a member of one of the aerial smuggling gangs. For some reason, either to get revenge for the death of a friend, or from sheer madness, he had appointed himself a single handed harrier of the patrol.

Brick climbed into the cockpit of the little scout and warmed it briefly. Burdick, with whom he had not exchanged a word, was warming his DeHaviland. The trim little S. E. 5 seemed eager to be gone as its eight cylinder motor flattened the tires against the wheelblocks. It was still dark enough for the exhaust flames to show plainly, and the ships seemed like fire breathing monsters.

Ordinarily Brick would have felt his heart bound as he took off into the chill dawn. Now as the S. E. lifted buoyantly from the ground his thoughts were milling around on the same old theme.

How long would it take Burdick to get him sent away from the Border under a cloud?

HE CIRCLED upward to four thousand feet, just beneath the ceiling of mist. Burdick was down at two thousand feet, just beneath the clouds. Brick was compelled to fly around, and sometimes through, these clouds, but there was never more than a few seconds when the patrol ship was out of his sight. It was his first assignment as protection pilot, and momentarily he forgot his troubles in the sheer joy of handling the featherlike little scout.

Time after time he had to force his attention back to his job and keep his eyes sweeping the sky for signs of the enemy.

"If I don't get Chute off my mind, I'll go nuts," he thought unhappily.

They had been in the air a little more than half an hour, and were sixty miles from McMullen, when he suddenly leaned forward and concentrated his eyes on a

speck in the air, five miles ahead of them.

"It's a ship!" he thought, and suddenly every muscle was tense; then, "It can't be him, though; he'd be sneaking around behind some cloud."

In a moment he leaned back, relaxed. It was a DeHaviland.

"One of the Laredo boys must be making a visit to McMullen," he thought.

He lost sight of both Burdick and the other ship for a moment, as he flew between a huge cloud, below him, and the mist above. Orders were for the scout to remain as high as possible, in the event of a combat.

The cloud was larger than he had thought. When he hurtled clear of it, he looked down to pick up Burdick.

"Great God, they're fighting!" he shouted.

As he nosed the scout over and sent it downward, motor wide open, he could scarcely believe his eyes. Burdick's ship, No. 20, was twisting and turning desperately below the other DeHaviland. Red spots glowed in the mouths of the guns. The higher D.H. was an Army D.H.—painted that way, at least.

"He must have stolen one, or painted up one he bought!" thought the wildly excited Wayne.

He was conscious of no feeling of fear. How soon would the outlaw see him? He'd run then; perhaps he would escape. Burdick must have done some wonderful flying to escape him even that long. He must have been taken by surprise—

His hand closed on the gun control to try out his guns. They answered, as the little scout, trembling in every wire and strut, flashed downward.

He was about to release the gun control when the stream of lead from the guns ceased.

"A jam, by God!" he thought despairingly.

He was a thousand feet above the twisting, writhing DeHavilands. Burdick, below the enemy, was at a fearful disadvantage, but he was fighting magnificently.

In the shock of the emergency Brick pulled back on the vibrating stick. He worked desperately at the ammunition drum. A bullet had jammed somewhere. There was no sense in going down there, helpless, right that second. He couldn't fix a jam and fly combat both, and he would be useless except to scare the outlaw away.

"Better take a second or two to try to fix it," was the idea in his chaotic mind.

He glanced downward. The roar of the motors was like bedlam from some unreal world. For a second he watched the combat. Then he saw the strange DeHaviland, swooping downward in a terrific dive, send a brief burst of bullets at the Army ship. This time, however, the outlaw pulled upward and headed south, in a steep zoom. As he leveled off, he continued to fly toward Mexico.

"He's seen me and is running!" thought Brick, and jammed the drum back in its place.

He darted down at the enemy. Perhaps he could catch him, and maybe the jam was fixed. He pressed the gun control and the guns answered.

The stranger was across the Rio Grande while Burdick was circling and Brick was but a thousand feet from his prey, and above him. His hand tightened on the gun lever. He had his head.

For just a second the shower of lead sprayed from his guns. The tracers were going to the right of the enemy ship.

His speed was terrific, more than two hundred miles an hour. He eased the nose of his ship to the left, moving the shower of bullets toward the target.

Then it seemed that his ship was flying to pieces. Something grazed his head, half stunning him, and the motor's roar rose to a wild scream as it seemed to be trying to jump out of a ship that was shaking itself to bits. Automatically he cut the throttle. His propeller was a splintered wreck. Either the C. C. synchronizing gear had gone wrong and he had shot off his own propeller, or the speed had been excessive and the propeller damaged.

In an instant he turned his ship around.

The other pilot must not know he was helpless—he'd be shot like a crippled duck, either in the air or on the ground. He looked behind him, just in time to see the unknown murderer disappear into the mist.

Burdick circled and watched Wayne as he spiraled down over a small field for his forced landing. It was a tough job with a dead stick, but he dropped the little scout across the trees, and by a severe ground loop which almost turned him over he made it without crashing into the mesquite which rimmed the clearing.

He got out to show he was all right, and Burdick disappeared toward McMullen.

IT WAS almost evening by the time Jimmy Jennings had flown a propellor down to him, landed in a field three miles away, got it over to him, and had it installed on the scout. Brick, worried lest he had used wrong tactics in the battle, nevertheless decided that he had really shown good judgment. Jimmy agreed with him, outwardly at least. He asked many probing questions, however.

Brick landed at the field at five o'clock. Over in Hangar 3, which was disused, a swarm of enlisted men were putting the finishing touches on the interior to prepare it for the regular semi-monthly dance, which was to be held that night.

Brick taxied to the line and got out of the cockpit.

"God, I wish I was landing with that thug's scalp in my belt," he thought for the hundredth time.

"Lieutenant, the captain wants to see you."

It was an orderly from headquarters. Brick, foreboding in his heart, followed him to the office. Kennard was walking nervously up and down in the room.

"Shut the door," he said, and sat down.

"Tell me about what happened," he commanded abruptly. "First, I might tell you that DeHaviland was stolen from the Laredo flight this morning while everybody was at breakfast. Don't even know what the gink looked like."

His eyes rested steadily on his desk, as if he did not want to face Brick. He listened to the flyer's story without a word.

"If I'd had one more minute before the prop broke I'd have had him," he concluded.

"I see," Kennard said slowly. His eyes lifted to Brick's. "Wayne, you never flew overseas, did you?"

"No, sir."

"In view of all the circumstances," the captain said, "I think it would be best both for you and the flight if we transferred you, Wayne. Down here we've got to have experienced combat flyers. Besides that, you and Lieutenant Burdick don't get along, and for the sake of your own safety and general happiness, I think it would be best that we transfer you off the Border."

Wayne did not move. His widened eyes stared into the captain's. The blow dazed him. When he was able to speak, it seemed that his tongue was still and dry.

"Did Lieutenant Burdick," he asked carefully, "say that I was yellow or something this morning?"

"Er—not exactly that," the captain answered him with averted eyes, "but—it seemed you took a long time to come down to his aid, and then pulled up—"

"I was behind a cloud first, and then the jam—"

"I know. It's not a question of yellowness, Wayne. Rather of inexperience, let's say."

Brick could scarcely talk. For the moment he felt that overwhelming disaster had overtaken him. His mind raced along, outlining his situation. He knew what his position was. A new man who had come in, did not get along with the executive officer, was not efficient and either a poor or a yellow flyer. Burdick, a veteran, a valuable man from the administration standpoint, a good flyer. If one of them had to be dispensed with, it must be Wayne. Once again he was to be transferred under a cloud. Worst of all, he was to leave the Border, a failure. Burdick had had an excuse to

brand him yellow, and he had done it. He would continue to do it whenever he had the opportunity, too.

Suddenly Brick found himself leaning over the desk, speaking in a rush of words.

"Please, Captain, give me another chance!" he begged as his voice choked. "I'll do anything any other flyer will."

He pleaded for time. Not a word concerning Burdick escaped him, however. All the boyishness in his nature, his love for the air and the Border patrol, his heartbreak at the thought of leaving, shone through his words, and the captain was too soft hearted to insist on what Burdick had convinced him was the sensible move to make.

"All right, Wayne, I'll give you another chance," he barked. "Whatever's between Burdick and you is none of my business. But it is my business to see that it doesn't interfere with the work of this flight. Whether or not you're material for a patrolman remains to be seen. That's all."

BRICK felt weak as he left the office. Burdick had pictured him as a yellow failure in McMullen. He was being given a chance to prove himself, out of sheer pity. He had been forced to humble himself and beg for something he had a right to have. There was the feeling within him that nothing he might do could possibly save him in the end. It was just a matter of time before he would be thrown out.

It was a savagely bitter young flyer who sat silently at the dinner table, taking no part in the animated discussion regarding the possibility of there being two outlaw pilots gunning for the patrol. It seemed more likely that there was but one, and that he had cracked up his own ship in Mexico, possibly while landing wherever his aerie was.

"Let's hope so," Kennard remarked thoughtfully. "It'll give any flyer an even break in a fight anyway. By morning we'll have it fixed up with the other flights to have a signal whereby an army D.H. can be identified. Burdick, you'll never be luckier than you were to get loose from that guy."

"He started shooting when he was too far away," Burdick nodded. "Then, of course, I had Wayne to protect me."

For a second the other flyers were silent, distress in their faces. The implication in Burdick's sardonic words was unmistakable.

"That'll be all of that!"

Wayne's head came up at Kennard's rasping words.

"Listen here, Burdick," he snapped. "It takes two to make a fight, and you seem to be doing your share. Keep your mouth shut, understand?"

"Yes, sir," Burdick answered humbly. "I apologize."

"Cringes when somebody higher up snaps at him, and rides the ones underneath him," Wayne thought to himself. "He's got every flyer in this flight thinking that I'm a quitter."

SLEEPY SPEARS finally persuaded Wayne to attend the dance. Brick went, because he felt that he'd go crazy if he sat around with his own thoughts any longer.

Normally he would have looked forward to it and entered the festivities with zest and abandon. As it was, he went into the thronged hangar without interest. He stood near the door, alongside Slim Evans. That elongated gentleman, to use his own phrase, did not fling a very wicked hoof and spent most of his time prowling around after a drink.

It was the invariable custom at the McMullen dances for all guests to come clad in coveralls instead of conventional dress, and tonight was no exception. Old-timers like Sheriff Bill Trowbridge and Mayor Sam Edwards, genially stewed, were swinging two hundred pound matrons around with enthusiasm and agility, and the younger set was far from setting the pace.

Brick stood and watched, settled melancholy on his drawn face. There were a lot of pretty girls there.

Suddenly he found himself gazing directly into the eyes of a slim girl who was dancing by him. Burdick was her partner, but his back was toward his enemy.

She was lithe and young and vividly alive.

"Best looking girl in the room," he thought. "I'd sure like a dance with her."

As though by some inner compulsion, he suddenly grinned a wide and admiring grin. Her smile answered it frankly.

"I am going to dance with her!" he told himself.

Just then her partner circled her about, and Wayne was looking into Burdick's eyes. For a moment Brick stopped in his tracks. That was Chute's girl, the one he was crazy about. If Brick horned in, Chute would be furious. It would simply add more fuel to the fire.

"I'm damned if I'm scared of him!" Wayne told himself.

For a moment he had hesitated, just because it was Burdick. He was ashamed of himself for his dread of the man. Because of that, his methods became bolder than they would have been otherwise. He would prove to himself that Burdick made no difference to him.

"Slim!" he called as he walked rapidly toward Evans. "Do you know that girl dancing with Burdick? Look—over there."

"Sure. That's Dorothy Howard, the current belle of the ball. Burdick has kept her pretty well monopolized since he got here."

"Introduce me, will you? Now, before the orchestra starts again."

He was fairly dragging Slim across the floor.

"Say," Evans jeered, "you don't waste any time with your women, do you?"

Burdick was leading her off the floor when the two flyers caught them.

"Miss Howard, may I present Lieutenant Wayne," Slim introduced them.

As Wayne bowed he saw that Burdick was smiling with the surface geniality of which he was capable. Brick, for once, scarcely noticed the older man.

"I'm just bound to ask you for the next dance," Wayne drawled, his eyes alight.

"I guess I'm bound to say yes," she laughed.

"Here we go!"

In a trice the suddenly boyish Wayne had her in his arms and had whisked her away.

"This was an encore!" she protested, laughing up at him. "Jim Burdick—"

"Gosh, I'm sorry," he grinned, looking down into her brown eyes.

Her face was framed in jet black hair, artfully bobbed and waved. She looked like a slender boy in coveralls.

The crowd became so dense that he was compelled to devote his exclusive attention to guiding her through the maze.

"Gosh!" he was thinking. "She is a peach."

"I'm not very tactful," he told her with that wide grin. "Slap me down, beautiful, if I'm too bold. But is there any hope for me having just about all the dances there are left?"

For a fleeting second it seemed that she was very serious. Her eyes seemed to be plumbing his own. For some curious reason he was serious too and a little self-conscious.

"Why, I came with Lieutenant Burdick but if you ask me nicely he won't mind resting once in awhile!" she said a trifle breathlessly.

He did rest often. Brick would have been more than human had he not taken a malicious pleasure in the patent resentment of the older man, but humiliating his rival was no part of his motive in dancing attendance on Dorothy Howard. He had capitulated entirely to her and he made no more attempt to disguise the fact that he was having a wonderful time than he did to defer to the claims of his rival. He succeeded in forgetting his troubles most of the time and his appearance reflected his enjoyment.

The sapient Mr. Slimuel X. Evans had watched them for a full three minutes when he remarked to Mr. Texas Q. MacDowell:

"That looks like a mutual click. Wayne's the fastest worker I ever saw."

"Looks as though the fair Dorothy might be in danger of falling," agreed MacDowell. "That's remarkable in itself. She doesn't ordinarily stick to one guy. I'll bet Burdick isn't feeling so good about it."

"If Dot is really picking Wayne in preference," stated Slim, "I agree with her judgment. Let's raid Mayor Sam's liquor. It's in the side pocket of his car."

THE JUDGMENT of the human flagpole was without a flaw, if the next few days were any criterion. Bruce Wayne found himself spending every moment of the late afternoons and evenings with Dorothy when he was off duty. The stucco bungalow where she lived with her father, a retired cattleman, and her mother, became a sort of sanctuary for him, and he found peace and an ever deepening happiness there. Dorothy greeted him always with frank gladness in her eyes. The slim girl was entirely without pretense, and she reflected her growing affection for the taut young flyer as plainly as he did his own increasing fondness for her. For an hour at a time he was able to forget the darkening shadows which hung over him. Going into the bungalow was like entering another world, for out at the field the very atmosphere seemed tainted by the presence of Burdick, and he had no moments of mental peace there.

Sometimes, however, the very joy of those evenings made his ordeal more difficult. Time after time, when he had succeeded in blotting his foreboding from his mind, a casual question from one of of the Howards would shock him into the realization of his position. The fact that the disaster which he was certain was going to overwhelm him meant the breaking of the tie between Dorothy and himself heightened his dread of the climax which was rushing toward him.

That the showdown was very close became increasingly evident as the days went by. Brick's quick capture of the time and interest of the girl had apparently infuriated Burdick to such an extent that he threw off all pretense of disguising his feelings. Previously he had succeeded in cloaking his persecution for the most part under the guise of official necessity. As a grim senior officer he had maintained the pose of exterminating a competitor in an impersonal way and sedulously avoided any public manifestation of personal feeling. Now he flaunted his hatred for the lean young Southerner for all the world to see.

The two men were like a pair of wild animals, barely restrained from leaping at each others' throats. When they passed each other their lips formed soundless insults as they saluted. Brick's face was thinner than ever, a lean dark mask from which his sunken eyes blazed forth their hate. The nervous strain had thinned him down to a piece of rawhide crowned with a belligerent topknot of red hair. In speech and movement he was more deliberate than ever, but the spirit within him seemed to shine forth and give the lie to outward semblance. He was always conscious of the fact that he was holding himself under iron control, and he was afraid that it would break before the proper time.

He was not thoroughly aware of the fact that the situation became obvious to the entire flight. Mealtime was an ordeal for every one as the feeling between the two lay over the table like a poisonous miasma. For Brick the last straw to make his burden unbearable came on the evening of the fourth day after the dance.

Sleepy Spears wandered into his tent as he was dressing to go to town.

"Listen, kid," the somnolent flyer said languidly. "This stuff between you and Burdick can't last. Either there's got to be a showdown, or one of you's got to go. I happen to be in a position to say with some authority that it'll be you and quickly."

Brick nodded, his eyes haggard.

"That day I resign," he said with slow savagery, "for the purpose of paying a debt."

"Why don't you let Kennard in on it, let me tell him the situation?" Sleepy suggested. "You can't fool me. You'd rather stay here with this Border patrol than anything else on earth. Between worrying about those damn' bandits, and other junk, the cap's too busy to notice things for himself. He's a right guy and he could call Burdick off. Furthermore, the reports Burdick's putting in against you—"

"I'll be damned if I'll run around and tell tales and ask for sympathy; that's Burdick's style. I'm sorry as hell now I told even you. Remember what you promised too, young fellow."

"Just as you say," Sleepy said quietly, and went on out.

Not even Dorothy Howard could now take Wayne's mind off his certain doom as a border patrolman. He was on watch that night, in the event that the aerial outlaws should appear, and the six hours of darkness were a Gethsemane.

BEFORE breakfast was over six DeHavilands were on the line, their four hundred and fifty horsepower motors roaring along on the warm-up. The flyers went directly from messhall to their ships. The monthly target practise was never skipped, even at a time like this when every man there was overflown.

The bellow of the motors died to idling. Mechanics stood ready to pull the wheel-blocks. Captain Kennard taxied out on the field. One by one the ships got under way in single file. Brick was to fly No. 3 on the right hand side of the formation, and he taxied out behind Sleepy, who was No. 3 on the left hand side.

One by one the ships turned and took off. Brick shoved his throttle all the way on and put his weight against the stick. He took the D.H. off smoothly, and as the seven ships circled for altitude he watched his instruments absently. His hand was always on the throttle, adjusting it with infinite delicacy to keep his ship in line.

The signal came to gather in formation. One by one the ships eased into place. Kennard was the apex of the V, and the other ships got into position, each one twenty-five feet backward and at one side of the ship ahead, and slightly higher. Brick eased his plane into perfect formation without trouble. Formation, the most difficult of all flying, held no terrors for him. There are no brakes for an airplane, and only master throttle handling can make a perfect formation. The V which roared along toward the target ground was a tribute to the Border flyers which no airman could help but recognize.

The formation would break into single file again at the target, and one by one the big bombers would flash earthward, emptying their guns at the circle on the ground.

Wayne, his eyes never leaving Tex MacDowell's ship, just ahead of him, flew automatically. Almost directly below was the river. Funny if they ran into the two bandit ships, he thought dully. He glanced backward. Burdick was behind him, and his ship was in perfect alignment. The man could fly, there was no doubt of that.

"About a week after I get kicked out he won't be doing much work," Brick thought firmly.

There was the target, two miles ahead now. He hoped he could sleep after he landed; he was completely worn out. He'd see if the doc would give him a pill. He was jumpy as a witch.

A startled cry, unheard even by himself, escaped his lips as a huge shadow loomed to one side of him. Automatically he nosed his ship all the way down, but it was too late.

The crash could be heard above the noise of seven twelve cylinder Liberties. The left wing of Burdick's ship had struck the right wings of Brick's. The latter's head was dashed against the cowling as his D.H. was thrown downward and sideward.

In that chaotic moment it seemed to him that the universe had gone mad. The rest of the formation barely escaped being drawn into the tragedy. Ships seemed to fill the air, like myriad bugs. His

plane and Burdick's were tangled together, going earthward in a flat, slow spin. For a second he fought desperately, trying to wrench them apart. The earth was reeling around him. They were done for; no skill could avail them now—

Then he caught sight of Burdick, leaping over the side of his ship. A second later a patch of white billowed out against the earth. Of course, Burdick always wore his private parachute.

"By God, the snake collided with me deliberately to kill me!"

He shouted the words in a frenzy. Suddenly his ship shivered, and the left wing flipped upward. Burdick's ship had torn loose.

The damaged right wing, having less lifting surface than the left, was pointed toward the ground. The heavy motor gradually dropped. He was skidding downward in a half dive, half sideslip.

He got control of himself, and his white face was as expressionless as a mask. With stick and rudder he fought the outlaw plane. In a series of dips and dives the crippled ship fluttered down in its last descent. His body was numb, but his brain clear, and working smoothly. He looked at death, and somehow it did not affect him. With all the skill which was his by instinct and training he methodically fought the ton and a half monster which scarcely answered the controls. One moment the airstream was sweeping his goggles from his eyes as he sideslipped; the next second the ship was in a spin.

"If I can get it over the river and sideslip in on the bad wing, I might get out alive," he thought unemotionally.

It seemed that his body and brain had been strained to such an extent that neither was capable of real feeling. It was like a dream.

He learned much about himself during those two minutes—things which were to leave in his eyes a certain confident serenity which nothing could disturb. Among other things he learned that it was not the fact of dying which he dreaded. It seemed a minor matter. It was the pain of dying which was on his mind.

Still more important was the fact that to die would mean he would never have the opportunity to revenge himself on Chute Burdick.

Hand on the throttle, feet strained against the rudder, right hand grasping the stick, he fought his craft downward. Two thousand, fifteen hundred feet. Burdick's ship hit the ground, and as the gas tank exploded a solid mass of flame glowed evilly, dying to an ordinary fire. The other ships, manned by helmeted men, circled round and round him, like buzzards waiting for a tragedy. Burdick had landed safely.

At every opportunity he tried to get his ship a few feet nearer the river. It would go into a dive, right wing dropping lower until it was in a terrific forward sideslip. Then he would get the nose up, momentarily, but always the ship keeled over on its side. Eight hundred feet from the ground it started into a spin.

For a crazed moment he thought he would never get it out. He straightened into a dive, for a moment, and got the nose up.

A hundred feet high—

There was the river below him! The ship was curving, parallel to the sluggish water. There he took his gamble for life.

He let it dive. The speed increased. The ship was vibrating until his feet danced against the rudder bar. The motor was wide open to help him control it. Twenty feet above the water he hauled back on the stick, and with his rudder tried to compensate slightly for the useless right ailerons.

The nose came up. He was hanging in the air, forty feet above the Rio Grande, crippled wing down. There he jammed on full top rudder. The motor was turning eighteen hundred revolutions and that helped him keep the nose up. The sideslip was a parted tailslip as well.

Grimly he held it there. At the last second he cut the gas, folded his left arm across his eyes and relaxed.

The D.H. crashed into the water. As it started to turn over his head was dashed

against something, and consciousness left him as he felt the water engulfing him.

WHEN he came to he was in the back cockpit of a D.H. with his head rudely bandaged. He was so sick and dizzy that he could not even think as he half sat, half lay in the ship. He had no curiosity about what had happened and no interest in the future. Never had he been so sick. He felt as if he was out of his head, and his body was one huge ache. Sleepy Spears was piloting him, he noticed. They must have landed and got him. How had he got out of the water?

It didn't make any difference. With eyes closed, he tried to ease his throbbing head and to forget his nausea. In a sort of trance he lay there motionless until the ship landed at the airdrome.

The featherlike touch of wheels and tailskid almost sent him back into dreamland again as the minor bumps sent sickening waves of feeling through him, but he grinned weakly as they lifted him into an ambulance.

"Bad bump on the head, but not much more!" the doctor said cheerily. "Sick, eh? Well, you swallowed a lot of water among other things."

Sleepy grinned down at him, but there was a very peculiar look in his eyes.

"Burdick pulled you out of the water," he stated. "I'll be in to see you this afternoon if they'll let me."

"The rat had to get me out, of course, with everybody looking at him," Brick thought without interest, and lapsed into what was half sleep and half coma.

He did not wake up when they lifted him out and put him in bed in the hospital. The strain of many days, lack of sleep the night before, and the wreck combined had made him a very sick young man.

So sick that it was the next morning before Sleepy Spears was admitted. Brick had just awakened from his sixteen hour trance and felt a good deal better, although he was still weak and his head ached. He was not particularly interested in seeing Sleepy. All he wanted to do was lie there with his mind as nearly a blank as possible.

"Can't stay but a minute, kid," Sleepy said as he entered. "There's quite a lot to do, one might say. In the first place, we got word that two ships, probably those damn' bandits, were spotted sneaking in and out of the clouds near Carana, and every ship on the airdrome except mine and the cap's is after 'em. If it's true, it means there are two guys to fight. They've started working together, now that they're wise to our scouts."

"In the next place—"

Sleepy stopped talking as his eyes met the hollow ones looking up at him from the bed.

"Yes?" Brick prompted him.

"By the way," Sleepy said nonchalantly, "it seems that something went wrong with Burdick's ship up there. He says it flipped up on its side some way and that either his elbow hit the throttle and knocked in wide open or else the throttle line broke. Anyhow, before he knew it—he'd been flying very close to you—he was on top of you."

"Yeah?" drawled Brick.

The blood seemed to rush to his head, and his head began to ache terrifically. He mustn't think of Burdick, until he got out.

"Sure lucky he had a parachute," he concluded very slowly. "That wasn't what you started to say. What's the matter out at the field? Besides the bandits, I mean?"

Spears tried again to undo his error, but Brick gave him no peace.

"Well," he said finally, "Captain Kennard got orders this morning to go to Washington right away for two months temporary duty in the chief's office."

"Oho!" Brick said without interest. "We got a new papa, eh?"

"No, I don't suppose so. The next ranking man'll command for that time."

"Who?"

That question was like a projectile fired from Brick's mouth.

"Burdick."

Sleepy got up and walked around. He did not think it best to tell Brick that a certain percentage of the flyers had not liked the looks of that collision, in view of all the circumstances, or that the flight in general was stewing below the surface at the thought of being left under Burdick's harsh command.

"Well, I've got to mosey back and help the captain," Sleepy said finally. "And listen, kid. Don't worry about anything. Everything'll be all right."

He went out, insulting himself for a blundering ass.

Brick lay motionless, eyes on the ceiling. He forgot that Dorothy Howard would be there in half an hour, to spend most of the day. He forgot everything but the blow he had just received.

As far as the Border patrol was concerned he was doomed. If he did not apply for a transfer himself Burdick would do it "for the good of the flight", and a black spot would appear against his record which could never be erased, or forgotten by the authorities. But perhaps Burdick would like to keep him there, to try to kill him again.

He must get out of the Army immediately. Pride and hate dictated that decision. He would never spend another happy moment until he had discharged the debt he owed Burdick for nine tenths of the unhappiness which had been his lot in the past four years. If he stayed in the Air Service, Burdick would ruin him, personally or officially.

The dreams he had dreamed were only dreams. Even Dorothy—how could he hope now to . . .

He turned over and buried his head in his crooked arm. Perhaps it was because he was weak and sick, but beneath his head the pillow was wet.

THREE mornings later he left the hospital. It was a dull, cloudy day, as if to match his thoughts. Despite the fact that Dorothy had spent most of the daylight hours with him and that a majority of the flyers had dropped in to see him, his incarceration had seemed endless. He looked older and he felt that his spirit had aged ten years. During every waking moment, and often in his dreams, Burdick had been in the front of his mind. He had visualized a thousand scenes with his Nemesis, and in some of them his fingers had been around his enemy's throat. Hot fury had burned itself out, leaving a hard residue of cold hatred.

The flyers had kept him posted on the news of the field. Captain Kennard had left, and Burdick was C. O. The bandits had not been caught, but the fact that they had been on the prowl again was firmly established. The rancher who had spotted them said that they had flown northward from Mexico.

"This ought to be a good day for them," Brick thought as the car turned into the airdrome. He was not particularly interested.

Huge gray dark clouds hung in the sky below a solid ceiling of mist.

He got out at headquarters, greeted the clerks absently and asked for the use of a typewriter. Behind the closed door of the adjutant's office he could hear Burdick's deep voice mingling with Pop Cravath's tenor.

His short note completed, he went in. Burdick had retired into his own private office, and the door was closed.

"Hello, Pop," he greeted that rotund gentleman, who did not look happy. "I'd like to see Burdick."

"Sure. You look thin, youngster."

He did. His unruly red pompadour emphasized the sunken cheeks and caused his face to look abnormally long and narrow.

"Go ahead," Pop reported in a moment, and Brick strode in and slammed the door behind him.

Ordinarily he would have been inwardly excited, although he might give the impression of physical composure. Now he was as cold as ice. He gazed at Burdick for a few seconds before saying a word. He slapped the note he had written on the desk.

Burdick reached for-a-cigaret and

moved restlessly. His eyes never left Brick's, and Wayne noticed with some surprise that the iron officer was very nervous.

He was hunched in his chair, hands on the desk, as if to spring to his feet. When he removed the cigaret from his mouth it was with a nervous movement, and his feet were tapping on the floor.

Brick did not know that the half formed, scarcely expressed suspicions of some of the flyers about that collision were felt by Burdick, nor that the hard boiled C. O. realized what the expression of that suspicion would mean to his Army career.

"Well?" Burdick snapped.

Brick smiled a wintry smile. Positions were reversed. Usually it was Burdick who had had iron composure, and Wayne who had been nervous under the strain of the feud.

"There's a request for transfer," Brick drawled. He seated himself on the desk, and his hatred radiated down on his enemy. "As soon as I get it, I'm going to resign, I think. I'm also applying for leave until the transfer comes through. If I stay here, I'm afraid I might get killed."

"What do you mean?"

Burdick was crouched in his chair.

"What the hell do you think I mean? I don't give a damn whether you're C. O. or not. We're alone. I mean that you tried to murder me, that's what I mean!"

As Burdick leaped at him Brick's hand shot out. It was open, but it knocked the older man back in his chair. Brick was standing over him.

"Sit there, you high ranking skunk," Brick drawled. "For three years you've been after my scalp, and plenty of times you've got it. You've got it now, but you'll lose your own soon. Anyway, I'll be damned if I'll stick around where the bandits are good playfellows alongside my C. O!"

Burdick seemed beyond speech. His customary steely composure was gone.

"I'M TELLING you something else," Brick went on. What did consequences mean to him now? "I can't fight you in the Army. You're always in a position to knock me kicking. You've got rank, and you've given enough parties to the right people to make you a big bug and me just a punk kid that means nothing. But get this, Burdick, and chew it in your cud. I'm soon going to be out. And after I get out your time isn't going to be very long in this man's Army! We'll see how much guts you've got when you haven't got your bars to climb on and your friends to help you and a uniform."

"Don't worry about any bars, Wayne! Why, I'll go out in the brush with you and ram your lousy insults down your throat in—"

"Yes? Maybe. And then when you get back have me court martialed for insubordination, or sent to Leavenworth for striking a superior. You see how much I trust you, sir!"

That mocking air from the man he hated was like the flick of a whip on raw flesh to the C. O. Burdick, unable to control himself, sat and cursed the controlled Brick. Insults poured from his lips until he could think of no more.

"Interesting, if true," Brick drawled easily.

There was something more terrible in his sarcasm than in Burdick's insane rage.

Suddenly Burdick leaned forward. Suspicion of murder hung over him. The Army is a closed corporation, and whispers reach its uttermost limits. He was as mad as the victim as he said huskily:

"They used to shoot things out in this country, things a lot less important than this, and insults a hell of a lot softer than you've just relieved yourself of, or me either. By God, let's see about your nerve! You claim you're not yellow! You're supposed to be a pretty hot flyer. How about a little duel? A couple of ships, plenty of ammunition—and one of us comes back!"

There was silence, palpitant with feeling. Brick, even in his unnatural con-

dition, was stunned by the suggestion. Only for an instant, however. Like a losing gambler who stakes his all on one desperate chance, something within him forced him to say—

"Great, Chute, great!"

His smile mocked his superior.

"Of course, you're an experienced battle pilot and all that. And you aren't troubled with any tender heart. You were willing to bump me off once before. Let's go, say I!"

Burdick licked his lips. For the moment the carefully calculating nature which was his became uppermost, and he had a moment of sanity.

"We're nuts, Wayne! The man that won would be worse off—"

"Oh no!" Wayne gibed him. "You're not getting cold feet because I said yes, are you? We get away from the field, and the survivor tells a tale about meeting the bandits. Why, God is with us! It's cloudy right now. It'll be dark inside of an hour, too. No investigation until tomorrow. Any story'll do. We could fight over Mexico, where the body would never be found. Who could tell that there was anything wrong about the lamented demise of one of us? Really, Chute, the idea did credit to you. Nothing wrong with it except maybe inside of you. I'm the one supposed to be yellow."

Burdick was on his feet. The iron exterior was no more, and he said chokingly—

"You're on!"

TWO D.H.'S were straining at their wheelblocks, eager to be gone. Two Liberties were roaring wide open on the final warmup, and two flyers were standing side by side.

The preparations had been a sort of unreal dream to Brick. He was numb inside. He had a feeling that he would wake up soon. Once a flash of reason left him limp, but it was momentary. Some power beyond him was forcing him on. His brain was clear, but somehow he was not the Brick Wayne he had thought himself to be. His thoughts and his actions were not his own.

As the motors died and conversation was possible he said calmly:

"I don't trust you from here to that hangar, Chute. I wouldn't let you get behind me until I'd signed my will. And you know damn' well that my point is well taken. The first chance you got to put a bullet in me without taking a chance yourself, you'd do it. So we fly side by each to the battleground, eh?"

"Suits me."

"Sixty miles or so down the river, where that horseshoe turn is, there isn't a house for miles. We turn south at the turn, and get twenty miles or so down over Mexico, where nobody's see us, O. K."

"O. K."

Brick, hard as rock and taking his own demise for granted, had become dominant. The heat of Burdick's hate had melted his shell of self-control, and the older man's fury made him the weaker of the two.

"This mist looks high, close to five thousand. When I raise my hand to you we fly in opposite directions—me north and you south—at the same altitude. About a mile apart we turn and come at each other, at the same height, head on. If I'm as yellow as you said I was, that gives you a break. You're a wartime flyer, too. The odds are in your favor. Satisfied?"

"Satisfied."

"Let's go."

A MOMENT later, side by side, they were driving westward. Brick handled his plane automatically. His brain seemed disembodied. He felt that something within him would snap at any moment. He knew what he was doing, and yet he could not believe it himself. He was like a lunatic or a drunkard who realizes dimly that he is not normal, and yet can not help himself.

Mile after mile unfolded behind the roaring DeHavilands. The mist was a full five thousand feet high, and Brick led the way to forty-five hundred feet. At that altitude he leveled off. Gradually Burdick's ship went higher, until he was three or four hundred feet above Wayne.

Brick noticed it, and kept a careful watch on his enemy. He stayed slightly behind Burdick, to prevent any untoward move.

"His ship's a little faster than mine," he thought. "Keeps up with me and gains altitude at the same time. Another advantage for the wrong side."

Far ahead, dim through the gray air, he saw the big bend in the river. The battle was but twenty minutes away now. He could scarcely realize it. He felt that he was going to watch some one else fight.

He shifted his eyes back to Burdick's plane, four hundred feet above him and fifty feet ahead.

"If he makes any sudden moves in my direction I just zoom and get him from the bottom," he thought. "I'm better off than I would be up alongside him.

He kept careful watch of the other D.H. while his thoughts concentrated on what lay ahead. He had no hope of being the victor, except by miraculous luck. He felt like a man condemned to death, but did not wholly believe it. He, Brick Wayne, of the Border patrol, was about to fight a duel to the death with a fellow officer. It just couldn't be the truth, and yet it was. His thin, keen face, framed in the tight fitting helmet, seemed like the darkly brooding countenance of some aerial devil. His lips were just a thin line, and behind the rounded goggles his boyish blue eyes seemed to be seeing horrid visions, endeavoring to make certain that they were but visions and nothing more.

In an effort to shift his fascinated gaze from Burdick, he glanced behind him absently. As he did so he found himself leaning forward, momentarily incapable of further movement. It was a dream after all, he thought stupidly.

Six hundred feet above Burdick, catapulting from the thin edges of the mist, was a squat plane which was diving on Burdick like a tornado.

"The bandit ship!" he shouted, and automatically he was throwing his own ship into a climbing turn, heading backward toward the enemy.

Burdick was evidently unconscious of his onrushing doom. An instant later red spots danced at the gun mouths of the alien plane, and Wayne saw the windshield shattered in front of Burdick's eyes.

For the moment Brick seemed abnormally keen sighted. He noted everything to the smallest detail. As his right hand shoved the throttle of his ship all the way on he saw Burdick's head jerk around as if pulled by a string. The next second he had snapped into a vertical bank, the nose of the ship pointed downward.

Wayne's own position was desperate. He, too, was below the enemy. As he endeavored to get a bead on that diving plane he saw Burdick go into a weaving dive. He was pointed on a course which would take his ship across the tail of Wayne's.

"The damn' fool!" Brick thought despairingly. "He's a perfect target in that dive."

A stunning blow hit his left foot. Then it seemed that a hot iron had seared his little toe. He looked down unbelievingly. A piece had been torn from the side of his boot, and blood was staining the floor. Bullet holes were in the floor. He threw his ship into a bank and looked behind and below him.

A third D.H, the Army ship the unknown pilots had stolen, was down there. It had been zooming upward, underneath him. Only a miracle had saved him from one of those bullets.

And that was the ship Burdick was after! Brick had turned into a sort of living flame, and nothing escaped him in that mad moment of roaring, twisting ships. Burdick was diving on the ship which had been set to get Wayne, and his guns were spitting fire. Four hundred feet above and behind Burdick, the other hostile ship was diving on the Army man. Its guns were also working. Burdick would be shot down in a few seconds, as sure as fate.

"Chute got him, by God!"

It was an exultant, inaudible shout

from Wayne. He was pointed at the highest enemy plane, shooting, as he saw what happened. Burdick's bullets had found their target. The stolen DeHavilland was on fire. Now it was spinning downward, its pilot limp in his seat, and a great trail of smoke marked its course.

Brick's bullets were ineffective, for the higher ship was diving too fast. Now Wayne himself was diving at it, endeavoring to get a bead, as Burdick started to zoom upward. Just as Brick was in position for another shot at the bandit plane, he saw Burdick's ship quiver and stall in the air. The next second Burdick's D.H. was spinning earthward.

"THEY got him!"

The remaining enemy plane, apparently satisfied, darted upward in a curving zoom, twisting in quick banks to spoil Bruce's aim. Now the two ships were at the same altitude, nearly half a mile apart, circling toward each other.

For a few seconds there was nothing to do but maneuver for position. A thousand thoughts shot blazing through the flyer's brain. Uppermost was the conviction that the two ships had been lurking in the clouds, waiting for the nightfall which was only a half hour away.

"Flew up in daylight, and were going to shoot up an airdrome at last!" he thought. "We should have been watching for 'em, damn' fools that we are."

Now the ships were coming head on at each other, climbing to the limit for precious altitude. Brick took a second to look below. The plane Burdick had shot down crashed in a mighty mass of flame, and then red smoke hid the wreck for a moment. Burdick had come out of the spin and was spiraling down. He was alive and in control of his ship.

"His windshield smashed, and when he looked around he saw the ship behind and underneath me," Brick thought. "Why did he dive on that one instead of fighting the one behind him? Saw a chance to pick him off, I suppose."

Certain it was that if Burdick had not acted as he had, Brick would have been shot down without ever having seen his adversary. No position in combat is so deadly as the one behind and below the other ship. But what a chance he had taken, letting the second ship stay on his tail!

Then Brick started to fly as he had never flown before. The two ships were but three hundred yards apart now. He forgot all the theoretical combat flying he had known, but the instinct of a born pilot and utter fearlessness didn't desert him.

Like a flash he nosed over his ship. There was a second or two before the other pilot was aware of the maneuver. His D.H. was roaring earthward, Liberty wide open, gathering speed with every foot. By the time the enemy ship had nosed over for a shot, Brick's D.H. was underneath it.

Back came the stick, and Brick's left foot jammed the rudder bar. He had forgotten his boot full of blood, and he felt no pain. The D.H. twisted, going half on its back. The motor dropped, and the ship started swooping out of the turn. It was pointed back toward his antagonist.

Brick caught sight of the other ship then. It had made a quick turn, also—it was in an ordinary vertical bank. He could not aim at it until he brought his D.H. out of the dive. The bandit ship got around, and as a burst of red spots came from its guns Brick pressed his own gun control. For just a second his tracers pumped into the shielding motor of the other ship.

"Didn't get him, but maybe it'll ruin his motor," he thought.

Again they were twisting and turning for position. The two ships were like darting dragonflies as they roared and twisted their way through the sky. Brick forgot he was in a ship. The D.H. seemed part of himself. answering to his will. Time after time there came brief opportunities for a burst of bullets, but that unknown pilot was too good to leave himself open for more than a second. Bullet

holes appeared like magic in the wings of Wayne's ship but he himself was unharmed except for his foot, which he had forgotten.

"I must get him—I must!" was dinning through his mind.

If the other pilot won out, he would probably go berserk and shoot up an airdrome all by himself.

There was a ferocious joy in the fight, now. Brick forgot all dictates of good sense or safety as he strained his frail bomber to the limit in wrenching banks and terrific dives. A shot, then terrific maneuvering to keep out of his opponent's way, another zoom or dive or turn and a quick burst—that was the routine under the darkening sky.

Then he thought he saw his chance. The outlaw plane was diving at him, head on, only slightly higher than he. He dared to make a quick bank to the right, without losing altitude. The other ship shifted slightly. The next instant Brick had pulled upward and to the left in a mighty zoom. For a fraction of a second his tracers poured into the bottom of the motor and cockpit of the other ship. A bullet tore through his shoulder as he went into a dive to get away. Once again he doubled back to shoot. His hand pressed the gun control.

The guns did not answer.

WEAK and sick, with his right hand useless and blood soaking his shirt, he zoomed upward.

"A bullet got my C. C. gear!" he thought despairingly. "I'm sunk!"

He was, unless he had damaged the other ship or pilot.

At the top of the zoom he leveled off, and dared to look downward and behind him.

"Got him, by God! he shouted exultantly—but had he?

The propeller of the bandit plane was turning slowly. The pilot himself seemed all right but his motor was evidently cutting out. The ship was diving slightly to keep flying speed. Brick was five hundred feet higher, circling watchfully. Three thousand feet below Burdick seemed about to land in a tiny clearing in which he must inevitably wreck.

For a full ten seconds the enemy pilot watched his foe, above him.

"He must know I'm damaged, or I'd be down after him!" Brick thought. "He does!"

The sturdy little ship below suddenly went into a steep dive. Brick saw one burst of bullets come from its guns. The outlaw was trying them out to make sure they were all right.

"His motor went bad from my bullet, he knows I've got no guns, and he's going to pick off Burdick as sure as hell!" thought Brick in anguish and the next instant his stick was all the way forward and a ton and a half of airplane, pulled by a four hundred and fifty horsepower motor, was flashing downward.

He had no plan behind his move for he could not fire a shot. The other pilot could not stay in the air.

"They're nuts, anyway!" was what was dinning through Brick's mind. "Otherwise they wouldn't have been doing the things they have. Before he lands he'll kill Burdick like a crippled duck while he stands on the ground!"

He was overhauling the diving ship below him. His motor was wide open, and the speed was so terrific that he had to hunch down behind the windshield to get his breath. He was growing weaker and weaker, but his mind seemed to be clearer. The vibration of the ship, so tremendous that the struts themselves were shaking like wires, jarred his crippled foot painfully. Twenty-five hundred feet —two thousand. He was right on the outlaw ship's tail, as if both were diving in the same groove. He was but fifty feet back of the tail surfaces.

"If I only had one burst at him!" Brick thought despairingly.

At fifteen hundred feet it seemed that his D.H. would stand no more. The scream of the wires drowned the roar of the motor which was turning up five or six hundred revolutions per minute more than it was supposed to turn.

BURDICK had landed. He was crawling out of the wreck. The bandit ship swerved slightly and pointed at him.

"In a second he'll shoot!" Brick thought.

For just a split second he thrust his head out the side. The airstream tore the breath from his nostrils, and hit his head like a club. Burdick lay on the ground, hopeless. The other ship was but ten feet ahead, and below him.

Then there flashed into the pale young pilot's brain a scheme born of desperation which took no thought of his own safety. The whole world was concentrated in his line of vision—the other plane, and Burdick less than eight hundred feet below it.

His D.H. crept up on its antagonist, foot by foot. The airspeed meter read nearly two hundred and fifty miles an hour. The other ship, motorless, could not dive quite that fast.

Brick's body seemed non-existent. He took a long breath and thrust his head into the airstream which was like a solid substance. It tore his goggles from his eyes and slewed them around on his helmet, but despite the fact that he could scarcely see he did not move his head.

Those tail surfaces were but a foot away now—

What had been a bedlam of noise became the voices of a thousand devils as the propeller of the DeHaviland bit into the elevators ahead. The big stick flew to pieces in an instant. Brick hauled back on the stick. His strength was barely sufficient to do it. He felt his ship jarred as its undercarriage collided with the plane below. His right hand was useless. The racing Liberty, freed of the weight of the propeller, was leaping on its bed, tearing itself loose, before his good hand left the stick and cut the throttle.

Suddenly all seemed peaceful as the quivering ship flew level. He looked down as he spiraled. The crippled plane, its tail surfaces a mass of junk, dived straight as an arrow into the river. A sheet of water hid it, and as it subsided it disclosed nothing but a few splinters of wreckage above the level of the tranquil Rio Grande.

Brick's face was as white as a ghost's, and there was a look as old as death in his sunken eyes. Nevertheless, there was a smile on his pallid lips as he spiraled down. He landed within a few yards of the mesquite, and as the bomber trundled swiftly across the clearing he shielded his eyes before it crashed into the chaparral on the opposite edge. The motor went through an opening between two trees which ripped the wings off, folding them back over the cockpit. With his good arm he feebly fought his way through and dragged himself from the cockpit. Fire might start. He fell in a limp heap, and then started crawling.

Burdick was lying only thirty feet away. The two wrecks were close together. It was toward him that Brick, his brain as clear as crystal but his body almost paralyzed, made his way.

Burdick's black eyes were wide open, watching him. As he subsided alongside the older man their eyes met.

"Good flying, Wayne," whispered Burdick, and blood drooled from his mouth. "Where did you get yours?"

"Shoulder and foot," Wayne told him.

He felt sort of pleasant, now that he was quiet and on the ground.

"You?" he asked finally.

"Right side—pretty bad, I guess. Bleeding inside, I think. I've got it stopped outside. Let's see yours."

Wayne crawled over, and Burdick's fumbling fingers finally fixed a rough plug and bandage for the wound just underneath the shoulder. Neither one had strength to remove the boot to look at Wayne's foot. Brick lay back, almost fainting from the effort he had made.

A patrol ship might come along before they bled to death, he reflected.

Somehow he didn't care much. He was feeling fine; a horrible burden had been thrown from his shoulders. God, they had started out to kill each other! And Burdick had saved him.

"Listen, Chute," he said weakly. "You

popped down and nailed that D.H. that would have had me cold before I—I knew what happened. You saved—"

"Hell, it was sensible," Burdick cut in in a husky whisper. "Got out of the line of fire from above and had a dead shot at the bird who was—was—going to knock you down the next second."

"Gave that guy above you a chance at you, though. You could have fought him."

"Didn't seem best. If I happened to save your neck, you did the same for me just now, so it's all even."

A cough racked him, and blood flowed from his lips. When it was over, his head dropped, and he stared at the gray sky.

"Listen, Wayne," he whispered huskily, "looks like I'm going to croak. There's one thing I want to get into the record. You think I did, and the rest of the boys do. I—didn't run into you that time on purpose."

"I believe you—now."

For a moment there was utter silence. Brick's thoughts were wandering away into pleasant bypaths. He felt fine, somehow, as if everything was all right. Old Burdick wasn't so bad, when it had been the patrol against a common enemy.

"Listen, Chute," he said, turning his head. "You're not going to die. A patrol ship'll be along any moment. What I want to say is this. You haven't been any friend of mine. You know that. But—but this stuff can't go on. You know. You win. I'll get out, I guess. It's sort of a new deal all around for me."

"Listen, kid."

Burdick had to stop to turn his head and let the blood run out of his mouth.

"I aimed to be as big as I could and have as much power as I could. I've been kicked out of the way too often in my life to let anybody that I can get rid of stand in my way. You did. You didn't mean anything to me, one way or the other. Just a fresh kid. That is, until you started stealing girls just for the fun of it. I was a damn' fool, but I—I was pretty crazy about Dorothy—"

"I'm in love with her."

He seemed to be drifting into sleep. He roused himself. Somehow Dorothy didn't seem important. Nothing did.

"Fine pair of sweethearts she's got," he said suddenly, and the ghost of his old grin was on his face.

Burdick started to cough again, and when the spasm was over he lay still. Bruce listened to his heart. He was still alive, all right. Rescue had better come pretty quickly, though. The patrol ship would be coming back from Laredo any second, now. Jimmy Jennings would want to make McMullen by dark. It would come.

Bruce lay motionless on the ground. His helmet was off, and his red touseled hair was down over his eyes. They were curiously peaceful eyes, now, gazing dreamily at the sky. His drawn face was serene, too, and the lines of pain had been smoothed away. He felt pretty good, better than he had in a long time.

There was nothing to worry about. Might as well sleep.

RESCUE did arrive in time, although neither flyer was aware of that interesting fact. Brick took little interest in life for three days, and was not allowed a visitor for two weeks. During that time, however, he received bulletins on the condition of Burdick, who was in the next room. They were not accurate, because he was told that Chute would surely pull through. The truth was that his life was despaired of, but at the end of two weeks, when Mr. Sleepy Spears had the honor of being Brick's first caller, Burdick had a better than even chance to live.

"He'll pull through all right," Sleepy said gently. "How come you two were playing around together like that?"

"Just a private joyride," Brick returned.

He shivered at the memory.

"How about those bozos we got?" he asked weakly. "Any dope on 'em?"

"Some—pretty accurate, too. The one in the river could be identified, and he was a Mex. The other one was an

American. The spig had been taught to fly by our old aerial smuggler friend, Von Sternberg, and worshipped him. You remember we told you how we'd knocked off three of that Dutchman's ships one night? Looks as if we'd got the chief as well. He can't be found, handily, at least in Mexico. The American has been pretty well identified as one of Von's men. Seems that the gang has been broken up, at least temporarily. All this isn't exact, but it comes from United States officials in cooperation with the Mexicans. Looks as if these two bozos started out to get revenge for Von Sternberg and their other pals against us. Probably financed by some cuckoo foes of the U. S. in Mexico, but in general it was just a private war to avenge Von Sternberg. They flew from a spot which was found by Mexican flyers, and which was evidently one of Von Sternberg's former headquarters.

"Fifty miles from Chihuahua City, it was."

"They must have been wise to us flying in pairs," Brick remarked.

"They damn' near got Chute and me, pairs or no pairs."

"The gang'll drop in later, as well as the fair Dorothy," Sleepy informed him. "See you tomorrow." He grinned from the doorway. "Hope that your mutual scrap'll keep you and Burdick from fighting among yourselves from now on," he added.

"Oh, listen," Brick said quickly. "We had a talk when we thought we were both going to croak. Tell the boys that I'm sure now—they ought to be too—that that collision was—was on the level."

He went into more detail about that conversation out in the chaparral, and at the end of it Sleepy nodded.

"That sounds good, and the boys'll be glad to know it," he stated. "Sure hope Burdick comes through all right."

His hopes were not in vain. A month later, three weeks after Brick's return to duty, a thinner, paler Burdick took up the duties of temporary C. O., and fulfilled them without gaining undue popularity, nor yet dislike. His first morning on the job was marked by his calling Brick into the office.

The tall redhead, years older in spirit than he had been when he had arrived at McMullen, stood at attention before his chief. His heart was thumping, but his eyes were tranquil as they met Burdick's.

"Just wanted to tell you that bygones are bygones as far as I'm concerned," Burdick said harshly. "You and I'll never be friends, Wayne, but as far as I'm concerned we're not enemies. Mind your own business and do your job, and you'll be all right with me."

A wintry smile stretched his lips.

"I'm applying for transfer as soon as Kennard gets back," he stated. "We'll both shed tears over that. I don't care for the Border, as a matter of fact. You did me a favor out there. Now I'm doing you one by leaving."

"You won't be leaving in less than a month, will you?"

"No, why?"

"Dorothy and I get married on the seventh."

"Am I invited?"

"Sure."

What is more, he attended, and was not unwelcome.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

A Land Once Forbidden

TALL AND STRANGE were the tales which used to emanate from the San Blas Indian country. It seems that conditions have changed very much for the better.

For some time I have wanted to sit around the Camp-Fire along with other *Adventure* readers but have never quite acquired the courage. Have plenty of material for many good stories, but not being a writer, have been unable to use it. For the past six years have been living in the San Blas Indian country. During 1922 and 1923 I lived and traded with them on the upper coast. Since then I have been working the lower coast, in the region known as Mandinga Bay; and while we have Indians living on all the small islands in the Bay, they are very different from the upper coast Indians. Our banana plantaion has been open for the last four years, so that the Indians in this vicinity are quite accustomed to the white man and his ways.

About seven miles from here is the Cardi group of islands where Marsh had his headquarters at the time of the Indian revolution in February of 1925. I was the first white man to visit Porvenir Islands some two hours after it was burnt by the Indians. I also have the Tule Flag which the Indians had hoisted over the Island. If you think this flag of enough interest I would like to present it to your reading room or museum which I believe you have started in your office building. I also have a copy of the original Tule Declaration of Independence which was drawn up by Marsh and forwarded to the American and Panamanian Governments.

The Indians on the lower coast are losing many of their old customs, although they are still quite free from Panamanian rule. Even on the upper coast nearer Colombia they are becoming quite accustomed to Spanish and white traders. While at Isle of Gandi where I had a trading station for over a year I witnessed many of their dances and tribal ceremonies. It is true that in these Ports along what we call the upper coast the Indians do not like to have a *waga* (stranger of any color) stop ashore over night, although if one is well known they do not object. Several times while going from village to village by *cayacu*, I have spent the night in the chief's house and been treated very hospitably.

Between the years of 1916 and 1925 the Panamanians had opened many outposts, established many schools and otherwise attempted to civilize the Indians. After the Indian revolution and resultant massacres all police outposts were closed up with the exceptions of Porvenir, Naraganah, and Puerto Baldia on the Colombian border.—R. R. BEARDSLEY, Supt. Trans. and Supplies, c/o American Fruit and S. S. Corp., Cristobal, Canal Zone. Box 1007.

Silver Foxes

THE FOLLOWING letter has not been submitted to Mr. MacCreagh, because he is unavailable at present. But because of the wealth of interesting information contributed by Comrade Young—and to correct an impression possibly outdated or erroneous—we print the following two letters at this time.

The columns of Camp-Fire will be held open, of course, for any reply which Mr. MacCreagh desires to make.

In one of Mr. MacCreagh's articles in *Adventure*, writing of the Abyssinian Expedition, he mentioned the raising of silver foxes in this country in such a way as to lead one to believe that it is a line of business and investment that it is well to keep clear of. He compares it to the financial uncertainty of mushroom raising. Personally, I know not a darned thing about mushrooms, but I do know quite a bit about raising—raising *successfully* —silver foxes. Therefore, my first time, I wish to step into the circle and say a few words in defense

THE RESTLESS ONES

There's a breed of men, and I reckon there's some as would call them queer
For they're never content with wages, or the shams and deceits of trade;
But when far horizons beckon, with the lure of each new frontier,
They hasten, with hearts courageous, to see how the world is made.

They never ask fair odds of any man;
They grin, and take whatever Fate may send;
When the last, faint hope is gone,
They've the guts to carry on,
And they mostly come up smilin' in the end!

Their far flung camp-fires flicker wherever the trails are new;
They lead; and each beckoning fire illumines the way for the rest;
But to haggle, and cheat, and dicker for a paltry dime or two,
Is an art they cannot acquire, so they never attain "Success."

They face the burning desert, unafraid;
Alone, they call the untrod jungle's bluff;
Where the tribesmen lurk to slay,
They pursue their fearless way,
And they bid the frozen Arctic do its stuff!

Where the life is raw you will find them; alone, tight-lipped, supreme;
Where fever and plague make ravage, unmoved, they scan Death's face;
They have burned their bridges behind them; they are off to pursue a dream,
And to teach the dark skinned savage respect for the Nordic race.

Their home's the bloomin' hats upon their heads;
Their objective's always just beyond the hill;
They've foresworn the timeworn groove,
They're forever on the move,
They're the Breed of Men Who Never Can Be Still!

—LARRY O'CONNER

of this interesting and well paying business; an industry that is growing steadily year by year. And before I go farther I wish to state that I am not financially interested in silver foxes or a silver fox ranch; that my connection is caretaker and manager of a silver fox ranch; that I have followed this line for several years, having worked on more than one ranch.

The silver fox industry is now on a pelting basis. Production is now greater than the demand for breeders. The swindlers of the past, reaping their financial harvest from the believing-without-investigation suckers, who swallowed without question the lies of the tremendous profits to be made from a small investment in silver foxes, are hard to find now. If the suckers who have been thus bled would have done a bit of investigating—Uncle Sam's experimental silver fox farm, and the New York auction sales—they would have learned that the investment of a few dollars would not have returned them hundreds; that the pelt of a silver fox sells for much less than eight hundred dollars. But if they had learned this lesson, the oil stock promoters would have hooked them, I suppose.

Ninety-five per cent. or more of the silver fox furs on the market today are ranch raised. The most of these are sold at auction sales, held different times during the year, in London, New York, and elsewhere. On request, the sales prices of these furs may be had.

For the past three years good quality silver fox furs have advanced 20% each year. The highest price received at the sale of Messrs. Fredth, Hauth & Company, New York City, December 29th, 1927, was $510. The average price paid for good furs was nearly two hundred dollars. The average price for all—good and poor—was $135,30. There were 3,222 furs at this sale.

The sale of the New York Auction Company, 212-218 West 26th Street, January 23rd and 24th, this year received $685 as the highest offer. The average price paid, for good and poor furs, was $181. There were 8,841 silver fox furs at this sale.

To give you a clear understanding, in a few words, of the costs and profits of conducting a silver fox ranch for the production of pelts, I will take for illustration the ranch I am now managing. There are forty pairs of breeders on this place. I do all the work without help, except a few days in the year when certain things come up, such as pilling, when two men are needed. The feed cost will not exceed $31.00 a pen, figuring on a hundred per cent increase. There will not be less than 80 pups produced this year. They will be pelted next December. Their pelts will not bring less than one hundred dollars each; probably more. And that is about all the figuring needed to get at the profits; at least, if one does his own work.

The above is according to my method of feeding and caring for silver foxes. There are ranches where feed costs are as high as $80 a pen, and there are others—far too many—whose breeding stock will not permit profits from the production of pelts; and there are a great many more who, although having good breeding stock, fail to produce good quality furs because of their lack of knowledge of how properly to feed to give the best results. And then there is the lazy and indifferent—indifferent to the financial results—caretaker who fails to make good. But they are being weeded out to make room for worth while workers, to the general good of the industry.

The silver fox business is an interesting business, and a well paying business, if one is willing to work and use his brain.—BURT L. YOUNG, Manager of the Jamestown Silver Fox Company.

A few days ago I mailed you a letter in defense of the silver fox industry, and I hope that you will publish it. Since then I have received reports of the sale of furs from the Fromm Brothers-Nieman silver fox ranch, Wisconsin; which is the largest silver fox ranch in the world. Their offering to the fur market (New York Auction Co.) was 6,600 skins, for which they received close to a million dollars. The best skin in the lot brought $685. Also, I have just received reports of the Hudson's Bay Company's London sale. The top price paid at this sale was $1,198. Milligan & Morrison (their main ranch is in Canada, and they have over fifty associated ranches in this country) had a lot of skins at this sale. Their pelts averaged about $278. The number they offered to this sale was 75.—BURT L. YOUNG.

That Troublesome Rib

MORE THAN LIKELY this comrade has some definite personal reason for not signing his name. We won't inquire; let the smile suffice. But of late years it has seemed to me that more and more girls and women have taken the Adventure Trail with joyous thrill in their hearts—and with give-and-take camaraderie in the handclasps offered brothers met along the route. While in old China—or in the United States, back when swoons and vapors and the latest hints from Godey's Book were chief weapons in each woman's equipment—the fair sex may have been both helpless and diabolical. They aren't either now, as far as I can see.

I recall with painful clarity one afternoon at Lake Onekama, near Manistee, when rather patronizingly I consented to play tennis with a very pretty young woman. Four sets later, nearly purple in the face, I asked some questions. It seems that she just had won the woman's

championship of Michigan! My score had been approximately what I should have made, facing the (then) incomparable Maurice McLoughlin. . . .

So while I'll grin with you, Mr. Anon., I demand a chance to remain neutral!

The writer has been a constant reader of your magazine from its inception and can find no fault with it; it is certainly the best in its particular field. Its arrangement, set-up, illustrations, etc., are appropriate and very becoming.

Of course, nothing human can satisfy everybody; in fact, I am sure there are people who grumble at the good Lord's works. And, at the last trump—whether it be a card game or Gabriel's—they will still be found grumbling and dissatisfied.

Carry on as you are doing; you can not improve on it.

Nevertheless, I would like very much to learn why all fiction writers deem it necessary to place a woman in the stories? And always ending in matrimony. The hero is often a fine fellow and deserving of a better fate than to be forced into trouble for the remainder of his existence. That is no proper reward for a good man.

Have we not Biblical authority that God made the earth and then took a rest; He then made man and took a rest; then made woman—since when no one has ever had a rest?

That the Oriental proverb announces: "Beware of woman, for she is evil and will destroy you." "Matrimony is an invention of the devil," etc.

Coming down to our times, is it not a fact that a man passes into bondage by the gate of matrimony? She owns him, body, soul and breeches; misses him, not account of absence, but because of poor aim, and, like the mechanic who called to make repairs, met the hubby and spouse, the former stating he "would like to acquaint him with the trouble" and the mechanic, being a married man, immediately said: "Pleased to meet you, Ma'm."

However, there is relief in sight, for it is reported that someone has invented a vanity case in which to store the dresses and, anyway, garters and neckties will soon be in vogue for dresses, so that the poor, misguided men may, even if deluded by the hope that two can live cheaper than one, believe that it is better than they thought and that to stay single is not worth the difference.

Ask your writers to have some consideration for their heroes.—A READER.

Visitors to Mexico

WHILE knowing nothing concerning the investments offered by his company, *Adventure* feels that its readers would like to hear just how to get good shooting in the South at minimum expense and danger. So the following free advertisement is hereby donated to Comrade Guynn. Sounds to me like he's got a mighty good idea.

We read with much interest the occasional inquiry on Mexico, printed in Camp-Fire and information columns of *Adventure*.

Nueva Casas Grandes is located about one hundred miles south of the Mexican border and the town of Columbus, N. M. It is a trading center for a district as large as the State of Kansas.

Nearby are several smaller colonies, some of which are populated almost entirely by Americans, the Old World and the New blending in perfect harmony.

Every year thousands of cross-country tourists pass within a few miles of the border, going to or coming from California. Few of these even get as far into Mexico as Juarez. They consequently miss one of the most scenic trips imaginable.

With the idea of bringing as many visitors into our section as is possible, a number of local Mexicans and Americans have organized the *Club International* of Chihuahua, with an initiation fee of ten (10) dollars U. S. money for a life membership.

Each of the organization members has been selected for his influence or ability to handle problems arising in connection with the project. Most of them are citizens of Mexico.

As items of interest to members desiring to come into Mexico for any period of time from two days to a month, the organization has acquired three tracts of land at strategic points, which cover practically every line of sport known to the United States.

On tract No. 1, which contains approximately 200,000 acres, there can be found quail, rabbits, ducks, geese and dove. This tract is mostly flat country and contains a large lake.

Some seventy miles further south tract No. 2 is located in the timber country and in the high mountains. This tract contains approximately 512,000 acres of virgin hunting grounds. Here will be found deer, bear, wild turkey and wolves for the hunters, and an unlimited number of rainbow and native trout for the fishermen in the numerous streams on this property.

Tract No. 3 is located about fifty miles still further south and west and contains about 180,000 acres. Part of this property is in the state of Chihuahua and part in the state of Sonora.

Three wonderful trout streams come together here and fishing is unsurpassed; and within a few miles is the river Arris which empties into the Pacific and is well stocked with large fish.

In this vicinity the hunter has his choice of any kind of animals known to North America, deer, bear, jaguar, mountain lion, lynx, fox, wolves, coyotes, turkeys, quail, partridge and javelina.

The famous Black Canyon runs through part of this section, and it is considered the backbone of the Sierra Madres.

This tract will be a Mecca for those members

who can spare the time and pack into the interior for a week or more. One may drop over to the western slope to a small fruit ranch belonging to the organization, and located in almost a tropical country.

For those who have no desire for hunting and fishing, we can provide golf on a prairie course—with the 19th hole close by. There are also numerous trips to be taken to the silver mines, quaint old Spanish settlements and haciendas. Some of the latter date back a century or two.

The club organization is almost necessary to facilitate the handling of any large amount of visitors. One attempting to enter Mexico without proper advice and assistance will spend more in time than the value of his membership. It is a simple process for those who know how.

With our representatives at the border the matter of passport, hunting license and bonding in cars and equipment will be expedited, and the expense eliminated, other than required Government fees.

All parties will be escorted from point to point and the Club will accept the responsibility for safe delivery.

The matter of expense will be cut to a minimum. Hotel accommodations and meals will be provided at a cost of not to exceed one (1) peso per meal and two pesos per room.

There are garages and service stations in operation at nearby points. Gasoline is at present selling at $.18 per litre, Mexican money. Oil $.50 Mexican per litre.

For pack trains we are in a position to provide horses at approximately one peso per horse per day. Experienced guides will be retained by the year.

Hunting lodges will be constructed on our properties. All members who can possibly do so will be requested to bring in bed rolls, as furniture and bedding seems to be two of the hardest items to acquire down here.

For the benefit of those who will come by train we will arrange to operate a bus from Deming and Columbus, N. M., direct through to the properties.

We will appreciate any comments and will welcome all inquiries with reference to this section. Yours very truly—J. W. GUYNN, Club International of Chihuahua, Neuva Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, Mexico.

Theodore Roscoe

"THE BUDDHIST MONK", appearing in this present issue, is Comrade Roscoe's first story in *Adventure*. According to custom, he arises to pass along a word concerning himself and his fiction background to new friends about the fire.

There lies on my desk a silver-mounted tiger claw from Kashmir, a colorful kerchief from the Punjab, a little brass Thibetan cow, and an inflamed card bearing announcement that my father is pompously invited to a Durbar given by the Talookdars of Oudh. To these little souvenirs—always carried for luck on peregrinations—I acknowledge inspiration to write of those lands beyond the sunrise. They whisper of India, of my mother who spoke Hindustani before she spoke English, of my father's adventurings that carried him as a young man into the heart of the Orient. The claw, the kerchief and the cow were my mother's—and memory of swinging down appalling Himalayan trails, riding through hot jungle and calcined desert even as her parents had before her. And from childhood I have heard, behind my father's pipe-smoke, gossip of the East, of scorpions and leopard hunts, of hairy beggarmen and obscure religions, of lands that stank and glittered, starved and sang. So the Orient holds a charm for me; I have always enjoyed writing of it. For me the Orient has the "it" of story color. Before many moons I'm indulging a wanderlust and going out.

At present am occupied spinning yarns and commuting around the States a bit, with desultory scholastic flings that invariably aggravate an itching hoof. Have chipped rust, swabbed red lead, and stood my watch across the Gulf of Mexico; and three weeks later watched the sunset enameling the roof of a round, red barn in tranquil Canada. To police and angry debtors will announce that I am a young man, dark-haired, fond of playing an execrable accordion, married to a typewriter, smoke a pipe, like to canoe, and have *not* got the Spanish Armada tattooed across my chest the way one of my bos'ns had.—THEODORE ROSCOE.

"Corn Silk and Cotton Blossoms"

JUST to announce that the first published volume of poetry by Whitney Montgomery, under the above title, has been brought out between covers by the P. L. Turner Publishing Company. Mr. Montgomery has contributed several verses, of late, to Camp-Fire.

Tristan Da Cunha

SEVERAL contributions and offers of packages for this far away corner of the earth have reached the office of this magazine. Two comrades—one a ship master who volunteers his services—have suggested that we charter a small vessel, load it with gifts of all useful and educational sorts, and sail it directly to the island. This would obviate the long delay—but it is an ambitious project, of course, and would entail a far greater amount of cooperation and organization than I had contemplated at first. But what say you all?—ANTHONY M. RUD.

ASK Adventure

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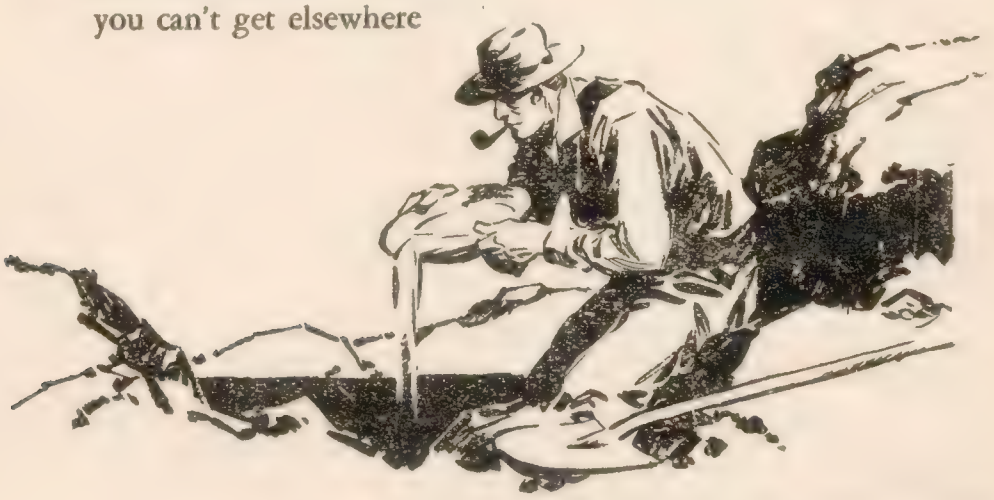

Texas Rangers

CONTRARY to reports, this famous force has never once disbanded since its inception in 1835. The present state of the Texas cattle industry.

Request:—"On the subject of Texas Rangers, conflicting reports have filtered over here on their disbandment. In 1924 Capt. Tom Hickman, of Gainesville, one of the judges at the Wembley International Rodeo, presented a magnificent cowpony, Tejano, to the Prince of Wales on behalf of the force. Some time later I read in a Texas supplement to the *Times* (London) that their disbandment as an illegal force was demanded. There were hints that vigorous protests would be made, and also a report that when the news spread that *los Rangeros* were no longer active a certain band of *Mejicanos malos* crossed the Border, finding to their cost that the Rangers were functioning to the last minute.

In '26 I read a story of an ex-Ranger who tried to settle down after the force had been disbanded; the next year a magazine published the qualifications for becoming a Ranger. *Scribner's Magazine* recently published a photo showing a group of 'Texas Rangers as they are today'. *Quien sabe?* Will you please, therefore, answer the following?

1. Texas Rangers. When were they founded? Have they been disbanded officially? Do, or did, they patrol the entire State? What was the full complement of the force? What ranks were there?

2. What is the state of the beef cattle industry in Texas today? Where is the Texas cattle country? How many registered brands are operating in the State?

3. Can you give any information as to population, history, etc., of the towns of Del Rio, Lubbock, Amarillo, Pecos, Ysleta, Waco, Laredo, Goodnight, Eagle Pass, Cowtown, Wichita Falls?

4. What is the Border Patrol? What is the uniform of the Forest Rangers, and is uniform compulsory?"—GEOFFREY E. S. TURNER, Oxford, England.

Reply, by Mr. J. W. Whiteaker:—1. Texas Ranger force was formed in 1835. Still functioning as per usual. Never been disbanded. Patrol the borders of the State and are sent to any part of the State in which the local peace officers are unable to cope with the lawless. $1800 to captains, $1200 to sergeants, and $960 to privates. They are appointed for two years. The Ranger force consists of one Headquarters Company and four companies of mounted men, making a total of fifty men. One quartermaster's captain. Captains and quartermasters are appointed by the Governor; others by the Governor through the adjutant general through recommendations of captains. Though the present organization dates from a law of 1901, a Ranger force has been maintained for the protection of the frontier and the suppression of lawlessness continuously since 1835.

2. Texas leads the U. S. in the production of beef cattle. In 1926 there were in the neighborhood of 6,450,000 head of cattle in Texas. The value of these was around $150,000,000. The ranges are fine this year. The principal stockraising sections of the State are in the western and northwestern parts, although cattle are raised in all sections to some extent. There are over 2,000 registered brands in Texas. Out of this number there are thirty-two really famous Texas cattle brands that have been placed on millions of head of cattle.

3. Del Rio, county seat of Val Verde Co. Settled in 1870; population 13,000. Large mohair and wool market. Lubbock, seat of Lubbock Co.; pop., 15,000. Chief railroad and commercial centers of the South Plains. Amarillo, seat of Potter Co. Settled in 1881; pop., 25,000; best ranching and farming country in the U. S. Pecos, seat of Reeves Co. Settled in 1887; pop., 2,000; ranching country. Ysleta, El Paso Co., one of the oldest towns in Texas. Waco, seat of McLennan Co., near the center of gravity of population; pop., 45,000. Laredo, seat of Webb Co. Settled in 1750; pop., 28,000; one of the chief gateways between Mexico and the U. S. Goodnight, Armstrong Co. Takes its name from the famous Goodnight ranch; pop., 350. Eagle Pass, seat of Maverick Co.; pop., 8,000; mining and cattle country. Wichita Falls, seat of Wichita Co. Settled in 1879; pop., 60,000; oil, farming and stock raising center.

4. The Border Patrol consists of the Texas Rangers, immigration officers and the customs officers. They all patrol the Border for the same purpose in the long run. The Forest Rangers are not required to wear any certain kind of clothes. The Forest Rangers, immigration, and customs officers are Civil Service appointees by the U. S.

Brakemen

A GOOD time to locate with Canadian roads in the western section is during the grain rush season.

Request:—"Would you please give me some information on the position of brakeman, on railroad lines in this country?"—F. SANGSTER, Lajord, Sask., Canada.

Reply, by Mr. R. T. Newman:—In securing position as brakeman on the Canadian railroads you would apply to the Trainmaster of the division of the road you wish to work for.

If you have not had any experience in this job of braking, and they were in need of men, you would have to make student trips out over the line to get on to signals, and familiarize yourself with the location of derails, switches, etc., and the many other duties of working on freight trains.

On passenger trains there are chances sometimes of securing flagging jobs on the long de luxe trains, and the duties of passenger brakeman are to help load and unload passengers, attend to the ventilating of the cars, call stations, answer many questions of passengers, handle switches when necessary, understand train orders and the movement of trains, and many other little duties that come with the job, which you soon get on to in working on passenger trains.

A good time to locate with Canadian roads in your section of the country is when the grain rush starts this summer and fall.

Hounds

A DOG for running brush coyotes must have a superabundance of the best canine traits.

Request:—"1. Where might I obtain a pure bred bloodhound trained for brush coyotes? What would one cost?

2. What is considered the best dog for fighting?

3. Would a great Dane be a good dog for running brush coyotes?

4. Would a Dane be able to start a cold trail and stand a long, hard run through a brush country?

5. I have owned a few Danes and they are good fighters, but quite slow. Now would a Dane be capable of standing up against a wolf?

6. I am planning to rent a cabin in northern Minnesota about the first of October. Where could I rent one in a good wolfing district?

7. Do you think this would prove profitable?

8. What would a 6 months' grubstake come to?

9. How many types of Airedale are there?

10. What type is the largest and best suited for wolf hunting?"—K. W. CLASEN, St. Paul, Minn.

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—1. I know of no bloodhounds trained for brush coyotes. They would be too darned slow for the purpose.

2. The best dog for this purpose is the Walker foxhound.

3. No, a great Dane would be of no service for running brush coyotes. He has neither the nose to hold a trail nor the speed to carry him fast enough.

4. He would be absolutely worthless on a long, hard run on a cold trail, simply because he could not pick it up and hold it.

5. Of course, a Dane is strong enough to stand up against a wolf, if he could ever get near it.

6. For a good wolfing district, in northern Minnesota, I would locate along the Rainy River district.

7. I doubt that it would be a profitable venture.

8. Figure on a six months' grubstake as costing you $300.

9. Only one real type of Airedale is now recognized and that is of the bench show type.

10. The hunting strains would do the fighting in wolf hunting, but they have neither the speed nor the scenting ability to carry them into making the kill themselves. A large Walker foxhound would be the most satisfactory dog for you in every way.

Llama

THESE animals have a curious way of venting their spleen.

Request:—"Is the llama a native of Central America? How big is it as compared with an ordinary goat? Can it be domesticated? Can it carry as much as 100 pounds on its back?"—DOROTHY DANIELS, Los Gatos.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—The llama is any of several wild and domesticated South American ruminants (meaning an animal that chews a cud), allied to the camel, but much smaller and without a hump; especially the domesticated variety of the *guanaco* which has been used for centuries as a beast of burden in the Andes mountains. It is about 3 feet high at the shoulder, and varies in color from black to white. Its coat is long and woolly, but coarser than the *alpaca,* which same is otherwise much like the llama.

These animals can travel great distances, but it must be by short stages of not over 10 miles each day, and on a long trip there must be twice the number of animals, so as to relay them. The load they will carry is limited to about 130 pounds, for one will let you beat him to death rather than move if he is overloaded or tired.

Only the males are burden carriers, as the females are kept for breeding purposes only. These animals appear gentle and docile, but they must not be irritated, for then they become very savage and spit their saliva at the object of their anger, and this spittle is very acrid, and will in most cases, raise a blister where it touches the skin of a human being, especially of a white man.

Panama Hat

THOUGH it dispel a romantic belief to announce the fact, this species of headgear is *not* woven under water; nor is it a product of Panama.

Request:—"Will you please tell me the process used in making Panama hats? I have heard that these hats are not produced in Panama at all but are really produced in Ecuador. How did they get the name 'Panama' or is this a word that both the hats and the country of Panama were named after? Is it a straw or fiber they are made of and is the work done by machine or by hand. Are they really woven under water? I have heard this somewhere too."—ALONZO F. BIBB, La Jolla, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—When the early Spaniards came to South America they found the Indians of the coast of Eucador making a peculiar hat known as the *jipijapa* (hippyhappa) which were of the shape and weave of the present day "Panama" hat we are so accustomed to. They were made for service and both men and women wore them. They were also traded to the highland Indians. I have personally seen Indians wearing these hats in the bleak Andean highlands.

Ecuador is still the chief producer of these hats, the best quality coming from the Province of Manabi. They are called *jipijapa* hats in Ecuador at the present time. How they became known as "Panama" hats is as follows:

During the gold rush to California great numbers of gold seekers crossed the Isthmus of Panama both going and coming. The *jipijapa* hats had got to the Isthmus and were to be bought in the stores. The gold rushers bought them in Panama and possibly thought they were produced there. So they brought them to the States as "Panama" hats.

The Republic of Panama has tried numerous times to import the leaf stems and make the hats there. I think they are even trying it now (ask Charles Bell Emerson) but they have not made much of a go at it. The negroes of the West Indies are also making a fair imitation. Any number of "Panama" hats bought in New York stores are Jamaica imitations. A man who knows the weave can readily tell them. I can myself. It can be seen in the inside of the crown where the weave starts and also how they handle the ends.

A first class "Panama" hat is of very fine weave and there are no loose ends showing on the inside anywhere. I saw a hat bring $700 U. S. gold right in the village where they are made in Ecuador (Monte Cristi). It could be folded up like a handkerchief. It was later presented to Elihu Root when he came down on a friendly mission.

The plant which furnishes the "straw" is a palmetto that grows from 8 to 12 feet high. It is fan shaped and resembles the saw palmetto of Florida and other places. These leaves are cut off *before they open* and then stripped to the stems and ribs of the leaf. They are dipped twice in boiling water and shaken out, hung up to dry in the shade and then put in the sun to bleach. They are then sorted into sizes and hid away in a dark place, usually up under the roof. Favorable weather is then awaited for weaving. Mornings and evenings when there is a light dew is the most propitious time, for the fiber has just the right amount of moisture to weave easily.

They are certainly not woven under water. This I can swear, for I had the same rumor in my noddle when I arrived there. It is something like the bunk you hear about being able to cut glass under water with a pair of scissors. I tried that too, as a boy. I have seen a couple of thousand Indians weaving hats and nary a tub of water to dip them in was in sight.

Mountain Fishing

STREAMS on both the Tennessee and North Carolina sides of the Great Smokies are favored spots for bass and trout.

Request:—"I would like some information about camping in the mountains of East Tennessee and North Carolina. I have been told that I could expect fly fishing for bass and speckled trout. Where would be a likely place to go?

Is it thickly enough settled that it would be more sensible to board with a farmer or stop at a hotel than to camp out?"—HARRY S. BROWN, Atlanta, Ga.

Reply, by Mr. Paul M. Fink:—In the mountains of East Tennessee and Western North Carolina you will find a multitude of spots where you can camp and find plenty of fishing, both trout and bass. Speckled trout, though, are getting scarce and are only to be found in the back areas, where the lumberman has not penetrated to cut away the timber. Many streams are stocked with rainbow, a species that is better able to survive in cutover sections, and good fishing can be found.

The largest rainbow in the South are to be found in the Linville River, and I have seen one specimen thirty-three inches long from this stream. Larger ones have been reported. The Linville Gorge, where the big ones grow, is difficult of penetration, but there are any number of places where you might camp, and if you can arrange to bring the family Ford along you would be in reaching distance of the Watauga and Doe Rivers also, where good bass fishing is to be found. Or you might go to the Little River or the Little Pigeon River, both on the Tennessee side of the Great Smokies, favored spots for trout and bass. The Carolina side of the Smokies has the Tuckaseegee and Nantahala Rivers and tributary streams, in which I have never fished, but of which I have heard very favorable reports. So are the headwaters of the French Broad draining the Pisgah National Forest. Near all these you can find either good camp sites or small resort towns close by.

The fishing closed season lasts until June 15 in Tennessee. I do not have a copy of the Carolina fishing laws at hand, but feel sure that the State Game Warden at Raleigh will send you a copy on application. If you go to the Little Pigeon and Little Rivers, these are in the Appalachian Fish and Game Reserve, and require a special permit at a cost of $2.00 for fishing privileges. The closed season for trout of either kind in this Preserve is the months of December, January and February. Permits for fishing in the Preserve can be obtained from the State Game Warden at Nashville or deputy wardens at Propst, Telico Plains or Elkmont.

Road Agents' Spin

TRY THIS with your gun, but first be sure it is unloaded.

Request:—"Would you be so kind as to send me some information on the 'road agents' spin,' 'quick draw' and spinning? Am a member of the N. R. A. as a sharpshooter."—HENRY PAVIS, Chicago, Ill.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—The quick draw, as done by many shooters today, is merely the act of drawing a pistol, either revolver or automatic, from the place where it is customarily carried, and getting it aimed in a very short amount of time. Most shooters favor the hip holster, worn on a belt, while the shoulder spring holster seems to be coming into wide favor now, as well. I believe the hip holster the better of the two, but it's hard to tell which is the faster position if the man using each knows his business.

In the rapid use of the pistol, learn to draw without giving it any weighty deliberation and just thrust the hand, with the gun in it, towards the mark. One should practise daily with the chosen weapon, empty of course, until that indescribable "feel" of the gun comes to you, and you will draw and aim without conscious effort. It will come with time and practise.

As for the "spin", I presume you refer to the old "roll" of the old times. The old single action Army Colt was hung on the forefinger through the guard, thus bringing the weight of the gun on the trigger. The revolver was revolved to the front by a circular motion of the hand, and as the weapon revolved away from the shooter, the thumb of the hand holding the gun caught the spur of the hammer and the continued forward motion, cocking it; the pull of the gun's weight on the trigger fired it as the revolver was pointing downward.

Appointment

U. S. MILITARY ACADEMY via Regular Army.

Request:—"I would appreciate any information on enlistment in the regular Army with view of a later appointment to West Point.

Could you tell me how long an enlisted man has to be in the service to receive an appointment? And I would also like to know what education would be necessary; age limit? Is there a school in the Army that prepares young men for admittance to West Point?"—SAMUEL E. KAHN, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Reply, by Lieut. Glen R. Townsend:—To be eligible for appointment to West Point from the regular Army the applicant must be between the ages of 19 and 22 years and have served at least one year. Both the qualifications as to age and length of service are computed to the date of admission to the Academy so that a candidate may be allowed to take the examination provided he will attain the necessary age or length of service by the time he would ordinarily be admitted.

Admission to the Academy from the Army is through a competitive examination which is based upon the course of study followed in the better high schools. There is no regular school in the Army which prepares candidates for the Academy. At nearly every Army post, however, enlisted men who have the necessary qualifications are given an opportunity to study under the direction of a competent officer—usually a recent graduate of the Academy—in preparation for the examination.

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